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ABSTRACT

This book contains 12 papers exploring the problem of strengthening the notion of the United Kingdom as a learning society by making the country's higher education system more responsive to the various social groups that have traditionally been underrepresented in all areas of the nation's formal, postcompulsory education system. The following papers are included: "Introduction" (Julia Preece); "Mind the Gap: Widening Provision, Guidance, and Cultural Change in Higher Education" (Rennie Johnston, Fay Croft); "Extending the Guidance Boundaries: An Exploration of Educative and Empowering Guidance Strategies for Learners Who Have Been Long-Term Unemployed" (Ann-Marie Houghton); "Disadvantaged Youngsters: Raising Awareness, Aspiration and Access through a Summer School" (John R. D. Blicharski); "IT (Information Technology)-Based Guidance: Reaching the Parts that Other Guidance Cannot Reach?" (Irene Chapman, Sarah Williams); "What's the Point? Questions that Matter in Community-Based Projects Designed To Counter Social Exclusion and Increase Participation in Continuing Education" (Colin Trotman, Heather Pudner); "As Broad as It's Long: Challenging the Limitations of Traditional Continuing Education Strategies for Widening Participation" (Cal Weatherald, Geoff Layer); "Dismantling the Barriers: Educational Justice and Access in Ireland" (Rosemary Morris, Brian McMahon); "Student Equity: An Australian Perspective" (Margaret Heagney, Margaret James); "Access Strategies under Severe Circumstances: Promoting Access in the Chelyabinsk Region of the Russian Federation" (Maurits van Rooijen); "The

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Role of Social Theory in Action Research: Working for Change in a University Adult Education Department in a Multi-cultural City" (Jane Clarke); "Youth Views: A University of Bradford Community Action Research Project Conducted with and for Young People from Minority Ethnic Communities in Bradford" (Nadira Mirza, Tony Jowitt); and "Does It Make Any Difference that We Are a University? The Community Perspective" (Julia Preece). (MN)

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beyond the boundaries

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Beyond the Boundaries

Exploring the potential of widening participation in higher education

Edited by Julia Preece
with Cal Weatherald and Maggie Woodrow

NIACE
THE NATIONAL ORGANISATION
FOR ADULT LEARNING

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Foreword

The majority of chapters in this book originated from a Universities Association for Continuing Education (UACE) conference held in January 1997. The conference was organised by UACE's Educational Equality Network and pre-empted a series of major policy papers during 1997. These chapters provide case studies around various equality themes articulated at the conference. The introduction places the projects in the context of current policy debates concerning widening participation in universities, in particular adult and continuing education.

Many of the case studies here represent project outcomes from special initiative funding from the UK Higher Education Funding Councils. In 1994/5 the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) initiated a competitive bidding process for institutions to propose four year research and development projects designed specifically to widen participation in higher education from 1995/6 to 1998/9. Forty-five institutions were funded in England with similar bids supported in Scotland and Wales by their respective funding agencies (SHEFC, HEFCW).

Contributors to this book are all members of UACE. UACE represents almost all universities in the UK. The principal interest of UACE is the provision of access and life-long learning opportunities for adults. The Educational Equality Network's concerns include all groups who face educational equality, from minority groups to individuals who are economically and socially disadvantaged. Specifically the network aims to identify barriers, suggest ways of developing appropriate provision and address pedagogic, curriculum, marketing and staff development issues and contribute to policy debates associated with such proposals.

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Contents

Page
Introduction *Julia Preece* 1

Section 1 **Exploring the boundaries of guidance**

Chapter 1 Mind the gap: widening provision, guidance and cultural change in higher education
Rennie Johnston and Fay Croft 11

Chapter 2 Extending the guidance boundaries: an exploration of educative and empowering guidance strategies for learners who have been long-term unemployed
Ann-Marie Houghton 20

Chapter 3 Disadvantaged youngsters: raising awareness, aspiration and access through a summer school
John R D Blicharski 30

Chapter 4 IT-based guidance: reaching the parts that other guidance cannot reach?
Irene Chapman and Sarah Williams 39

Section 2 **Regional development strategies for widening participation**

Chapter 5 What's the point? Questions that matter in community-based projects designed to counter social exclusion and increase participation in continuing education
Colin Trotman and Heather Pudner 47

Chapter 6 As broad as it's long: challenging the limitations of traditional continuing education strategies for widening participation
Cal Weatherald and Geoff Layer 56

Section 3 **International perspectives on equity: lessons to be learned**

Chapter 7 Dismantling the barriers: educational justice and access in Ireland
Rosemary Morris and Brian McMahon 67

Chapter 8 Student equity: an Australian perspective
Margaret James and Margaret Heagney 75

Chapter 9 Access strategies under severe circumstances: promoting access in the Chelyabinsk region of the Russian Federation
Maurits van Rooijen 84

Section 4 **Researching equity issues**

Chapter 10 The role of social theory in action research: working for change in a university adult education department in a multi-cultural city
Jane Clarke 93

Chapter 11 Youth views: a University of Bradford community action research project conducted with and for young people from minority ethnic communities in Bradford
Nadine Mirza and Tony Jowitt 100

Chapter 12 Does it make any difference that we are a university? The community perspective
Julia Preece 107

Notes on contributors 116

Index 119

Introduction

Julia Preece

'Boundary' is a metaphor often associated with higher education (HE), particularly in its role as an institution which keeps people out, rather than lets people in. The title of *Beyond the Boundaries* focuses on projects which touch populations that universities do not normally reach. Most of the work described in this book entails a re-visiting of common assumptions about access. Some challenge, for example, normative expectations for university adult education, continuing education or guidance roles. Several studies take place physically beyond the boundary walls of the university. In other cases activities are deliberately placed within the university but in ways which disturb other boundaries of academic conventions. Higher education boundaries are therefore seen as something to work beyond, as well as move or cross, in order to demonstrate what is possible and desirable for an inclusive higher education system.

A primary challenge for widening participation initiatives is to influence institutional change and perceptions of access for new student populations. Some may feel that this has already happened. In 1989, for instance, Fulton claimed that the case for access had been won (Fulton, 1989). Eight years on it might equally be argued, judging by the wealth of recent publications (Coffield and Williamson, 1997; Schuller, 1995; Scott, 1993; Duke, 1992 for example) that the case for institutional change has also been won. The reality, however, is that both access and institutional change are still piecemeal and fragmented. So how is the academic field placed for the twenty-first century? This introduction provides a brief reflection on current thinking regarding university education for the wider public. It then relates these reflections to the strands and themes of the ensuing chapters.

The HE field is changing. In spite of fluctuations, the prospective trend for the future is a less homogeneous student population and differential modes of study. These trends have generally been stimulated by the upskilling needs of a fast-changing world and demographic age population shifts (McGivney, 1996; Ball, 1996; NIACE, 1993). But HE is changing unevenly. Widened participation has been concentrated in the new universities, while across the sector certain minority ethnic groups, people with disabilities and people of all ages from socio-economic groups four and five are disproportionately under-represented (Dearing, 1997). Alongside this trend is growing evidence that marginal social groups are also the most vulnerable to drop-out or withdrawal from courses even though those who do succeed are likely to do as well as, or better than, their younger, or more middle class, counterparts (McGivney, 1996).

Research is also showing that participation rates in HE from certain social groups often need to be understood in the context of prevailing public perceptions of a system which is elitist and bears little relevance to ordinary lives (Johnston, Weatherald and Layer, Mirza and Jowitt, Trotman and Pudner, Preece in this book).

These papers are a timely response to the current access and change debate and complement the more theoretical discussions concerning what kind of HE should be on offer as we move towards the millennium.

Many such publications concerning HE, continuing education (CE), community education and widening provision reveal a reflective mood. Scott, for instance, places today's university in a new era. The university's old scientific certainties of scholarship, research and the production of knowledge are caught in an 'academic pluralism' which deconstructs truth as 'a mere discourse', resulting in more interdependent and 'fuzzy' forms of knowledge (Scott, 1997: 9). The mass university no longer enjoys the protected, autonomy of its old elitism. Instead it must respond to market forces and be accountable to society. It must also share its knowledge with other organisations. He asks: 'How has the mass university responded to these challenges?' (p 12).

Taylor (1997) also considers the impact of the free market ideology, this time in a European context and with particular consideration of social purpose CE. Continuing education, he acknowledges, has never quite been the autonomous activity of its parent institution, though even university autonomy is arguably trapped by its own discourse. Like Scott, Taylor asks for a redefinition of CE – but within a new context of social purpose – one which embraces the new market but which also retains the old community ideals of citizenship and collective advancement. He identifies tensions between these ideals and the renewed access debates of individual advancement. Mayo (1997), Williams (1997) and Bird (1996), on behalf of minority groups and the more direct goals of access into the mainstream defend these ideals as essential starting points for the inclusion of minority groups in HE. They also ask for some of this access-oriented, anti-racist and political agenda to be incorporated into mainstream practices to avoid the continued silencing of the minority voice within the institution itself. Bird, for instance, states it is important to challenge the denial of institutional racism (*ibid*: 87). Chapters ten and eleven in the final section discuss some of the practicalities involved in addressing these concerns.

Rockhill raises somewhat pessimistically the discourse issue once again: 'Now our discourses of inclusion are excluding, in effect' (1996: 182). She points to how the discourse of lifelong learning 'masks the reality of what is needed to accomplish it' (p 185). She claims that the tactic of paying repeated lipservice to the values of equity is effectively silencing those who are saying it is not happening. Mayo (1997) is slightly more optimistic. She suggests that the discourse of lifelong learning creates new potential for adult community education. She is concerned that learners are given the opportunity to distinguish for themselves between the market-led and social justice perspectives for adult education so they can make informed and educational decisions about their own learning goals. The new agenda needs to justify the critical problem posing approach to education as an aspect of understanding change in the global world of production. She also justifies this form of education as a basis for developing informed strategies to combat the root causes of issues such as poverty and ill health.

Whilst there is a consensus amongst the above writers of the need for continued social purpose education and its integration into mainstream structures, others are less certain as to the practicalities of a learning model which is accreditation linked. Jansen and Wildermeersch (1996), for example, claim that the drive for accreditation merely reinforces an identity of disadvantage amongst those without qualifications and forces them into a normative accreditation structure which once more does not necessarily recognise their own, subjugated knowledge. They, too, ask for an education which has social meaning beyond the competency oriented model of accreditation. Finally, Bagnal raises the philosophical problem of reconciling a CE postmodernity with the notion of contingent knowledge. He poses the tensions of old certainties like predictability and stability against the advantages of flexibility and recognition of minority interests, or mutual understanding against 'ambivalence and ambiguity of meaning' (Bagnall, 1994: 278). It might be argued, of course, that certainty was only ever a minority elitist concept.

Within the above arguments there is a growing awareness of minority interests but some confusion as to what this means for policy frameworks and HE institutions. Three policy documents provide an insight into future directions for adult and CE across the further and HE sector.

The Kennedy Report on widening participation in further education (FE), makes strong claims for a learner entitlement with recognition that this must be on the learner's terms:

> *Unless participants get what they want, where they want it at the right cost, we will not get the widening of participation to the degree needed (1997: 9).*

These words suggest a needs-led service. They are accompanied by considerations of terminology: 'There is too limited a definition of learner and too narrow a focus on the range of learning opportunities' (p 23); with a recognition of the value of uncertificated learning as part of 'the ladders leading to the achievement of targets' (p 23). It is this latter statement, however, which exposes the kind of provision on offer. Its discourse promotes equity and flexibility, but within a linear framework and linked to the very targets which Jansen and Wildermeersch were so anxious to avoid. Whilst collaborative, local strategies, with extended learning support are promoted, this is advocated within a national credit framework. Nevertheless this framework is recommended in the context of a system which will assess 'learning gain' – implying that achievement might include more than formal achievements. Similarly the phrase 'relevant curriculum' (p 84) could also be interpreted to include a notion of culturally sensitive curriculum. Education in the Kennedy report, then, is described in broad terms as a strategy for reaching out to communities, using a combination of mass immersion: 'What is needed is a sea change in the public attitude to learning'; by using the media, promoting a 'positive view' of learning; and using collaborative strategies to stimulate demand (pp 102–104). In spite of the report's pro-active stance towards new learners, it may well have ignored the fragile starting positions of some of the people in these case studies. The report still, for instance, places the problem of 'attitude' with the public, rather than recognising the role of institutional power in shaping such attitudes.

The Dearing Report (1997) on HE is more cautious in how it wants to invite the public in. There is only space here to give a brief reference to the implications of the report. Nevertheless the fact that it devotes a whole chapter, with supporting feeder documentation, to the issue of widening participation deserves comment. Indeed the Inquiry Commission's original terms of reference included the requirement to consider 'maximum participation' and a 'growing diversity of students'. It also acknowledged the virtually unaltered participation rates amongst socio-economic groups four and five since the Robbins report in 1963 – a category which applies to many of the participants in these chapters. The extent to which the profile of widening participation is raised is evident in the report's first seven recommendations. There are a number of positive features to the report. For instance, it recognises the need for more HE, with a system of learning stopping-off and re-entry points. This would accommodate to some extent learner concerns to proceed at their own pace. There is also a recognition of the continued need for special initiatives to widen participation.

On the other hand, Rockhill's (1996) point is arguably confirmed; the discourse of widening participation has effectively silenced other discourses of equal opportunities. From this viewpoint the report continues with what could be construed as a fundamental contradiction of mission. Although its vision describes HE as a learning entitlement and as a function of social democracy, it then constrains that pluralistic entitlement in a model which defines and categorises people according to socio economic status without reference to different forms of knowledge or curriculum. The report largely addresses participation targets in terms of social cohorts who are statistically under-represented in the system overall and learning targets in terms of a functional image of HE levels. So, the report suggests a wider framework of qualifications 'which will provide a greater flexibility to students who wish to enter and exit HE at different levels, with a qualification value' (par 7.31).

Some of the case studies in this book have adopted strategies which might fit into Dearing's model. Of particular concern to the wider access debate, however, is the report's virtual abdication of responsibility for current participation rates in HE: 'The prime causes of uneven participation. . . lie outside higher education' (par 7.24). There is a continued emphasis, then, on placing the burden of participation outside of the HE sector. Furthermore, recommendation one suggests that widening participation in actuality will simply encourage a wider pool of people into an existing infrastructure and only then at 'sub-degree level'. The implication here is that if the pool is widened, the range of participants won't have sufficient ability to function within the boundaries of HE's unchanged framework. The chapters in this book often argue for a different kind of HE to accommodate new participants rather than promote Dearing's proposal for differential learning levels of achievement. Indeed there is evidence from past assumptions of this nature that the Dearing calculation may be erroneous:

> *A Nuffield study of university selection, published in 1961, suggested that 'nearly 7% of all boys and over 4% of all girls could eventually reach the stage of applying for admission to a university'. . . that answer seems rather silly now (Ball, 1996: 8).*

Whilst there are political and economic justifications to the rationale of a graded higher entry and exit system which will ultimately benefit some students, there is a danger that the new HE policy is not advocating change in terms of its ways of knowing or doing and the European model of credit accumulation and transfer underplays the value of social purpose education identified earlier in this introduction and discussed in Chapters 1 and 5.

There are, of course, many opportunities (taking financial considerations aside) outlined in these reports. The FE and HE systems as a whole are becoming more flexible and participants will benefit from such diversification (Smith and Saunders, 1991). It remains to be seen, however, whether the new systems under construction are being designed to embrace a wider dimension of critical thought or simply a new kind of vocationalism.

The more recent Fryer report, *Learning for the Twenty-first Century*, takes a broader vision of lifelong learning than the more focused Dearing and Kennedy documents. It uses language which overtly embraces pluralism, inclusiveness and attitudinal change with 'a greater sharing of the responsibility for lifelong learning between individuals, employers and the state' (1997: 5). It also advocates strategies which give increased recognition to non formal and diverse learning places and which recognise 'stages of achievement and types of participation which are not currently included in the National Targets' (p 8).

Furthermore, the report highlights that much learning achievement amongst those designated as 'non participant' is currently unrecognised or unrecorded (p 16). Lifelong learning is described collectively as an opportunity for 'critical reflection and creative initiative' (p 17) – terms which have hitherto been reserved for HE. It also pays homage to the effectiveness of outreach and development work:

> *which is often the vital prelude to eventually wider participation . . . their precise outcomes may be difficult to calibrate, but their general benefits are not at all to be doubted (p 21).*

Perhaps the paper's most significant development of the earlier policy documents is its statement: 'No part of the system should look to another principally to compensate for its own failure to stimulate commitment to learning and promote achievement' (p 28). This suggests that universities are being asked to share the responsibility for working with under-represented groups in a lifelong learning capacity – which by implication, could mean offering learning experiences which lie outside normative notions of university study. A corollary to these issues is the requirement for research involvement (p 37) and institutional innovation (p 40). The forefronting of these discourses is a significant departure from previous documents. It is, however, written in the wake of Dearing and Kennedy. The substance of the report may be interpreted in the context of a system which already separates HE from a broader base of lifelong learning. For HE (in particular, CE) to effectively tackle issues such as those raised in the Fryer report, would necessitate an acknowledgement by HE that it is part of the problem and that HE must play its part in developing the total lifelong learning framework, rather than just one section of it.

The following chapters begin to address some of the above issues. Their primary purpose is to record the cutting edge of current practice and raise some of the concerns still surrounding access strategies which often, of necessity, work outside of the institutional mainstream's normative boundaries. To this end the chapters address three main themes:

- embedding widening participation policy into the institutional mainstream
- separately managed CE systems and the social purpose of lifelong learning in an HE context
- representing the voice of the socially excluded within the university.

Four Sections reflect the focus of those themes. The first two Sections look at *Guidance* and *Regional Development* from a range of institutional and departmental perspectives. Chapter 1 starts with a reflection on the different university traditions for widening participation initiatives. It re-articulates Taylor's (1997) concerns regarding social purpose education and highlights some of the tensions between guidance initiatives and the implications for change within the university infrastructure. This is followed by three more descriptive examples of very different guidance initiatives. Chapter 2 explores how far guidance stretches into ongoing learner support for long-term unemployed adults on a one-year community development course; Chapter 3 highlights the potential of an intensive summer school strategy to introduce disadvantaged young adults into the university mainstream. Chapter 4 explores a collaborative community-based IT initiative designed to broaden the base of traditional information systems. All the papers stress the need to recognise 'difference' in both strategy and delivery methods if under-represented groups are to benefit from these critical first stages of guidance and support. Projects are often long-term and labour intensive.

A further two case studies address the notion of guidance and recruitment from a broader, community partnership perspective. Both chapters offer a descriptive analysis of very different regions, with consequent requirements for localised strategies to address community needs. Chapter 5 re-visits Johnston and Croft's (Chapter 1) question of an inclusive curriculum and useful knowledge for marginalised and under-represented groups; this time focusing in on one particular South Wales community. The detailed picture of the ward's socio-economic deprivation provides a practical 'reality' backdrop to the theoretical concerns outlined in Chapter 1 in terms of recruitment and participation amongst people with competing priorities. An intergenerational approach is recommended which blurs the boundaries between different kinds of educational divides. Chapter 6 expands on this latter theme by rejecting the conventional age distinctions for CE developments. Sheffield Hallam University adopts a whole-institution strategy through a high-profile unit of access and guidance, again with long-term goals of building relationships with different sectors of its catchment with all ages. The emphasis here is on differential approaches for different sectors of the community. The next two Sections address these themes respectively from *international* and *research* perspectives.

Section 3 provides a more political overview of equity issues in relation to deepening the participation profile of HE students. This includes three international orientations before returning to the UK scene in Section 4.

Chapter 7 pursues the theme of curriculum relevance and institutional change in the form of a debate between an academic and a working class student. The student highlights the apparent absence of any social or political awareness of the Irish context in Irish university curricula – such as its conflicts in the North or their causes. He sees these omissions as a particularly alienating aspect of the equity debate, and which have applicability beyond Ireland.

Where Chapter 7 advocates closer involvement of working class issues at the curriculum level, Chapters 8 and 9 look at whole-institutional attempts to develop equity policies. Firstly an outline of Australia's legislative framework provides a particularly timely comparative analysis of the potential effects of policies which are driven by equity concerns. Compared with the isolated outreach emphasis of the British models, this chapter shows both the benefits and problems stemming from a whole-institutional change approach on participation rates for marginalised social groups. Chapter 9 holds onto the theme of change management, but this time in the context of a country where health and disability issues have become the concern of the majority population. This chapter explores the process of implementing institutional change in a university in the Chelyabinsk region of the Russian federation. It also highlights the value of different ways of knowing, in order to tackle access from new perspectives. As in Chapter 8, the author emphasises the desirable policy links between equity and quality in order to effect change.

The final Section returns to the UK where three separate research projects explore some of the implications for delivering HE in a pluralistic and inclusive society. Chapters 10, 11 and 12 revisit the theme of community based access. This time each chapter takes an action research perspective for identifying and addressing the social purpose and curriculum dimensions of community provision. The focus of two chapters is the educational needs of minority ethnic communities. Chapter 10 explores this through the use of a research map and in the context of staff development for black tutors. Both Chapters 10 and 11 emphasise the need for a reciprocal action research approach to marginalised communities, where institutional research is accompanied by tangible gain for the communities themselves by way of course provision. Both chapters also highlight the wider social context of racism and social behaviours which impact on such communities and their ability to participate through the education system on equal terms. Where Chapter 10 looks primarily at research methodology, however, Chapter 11 focuses on the events surrounding an ethnic minority led project for young people in Bradford. This entailed training disenfranchised young people to research the needs and views of their own community. It emphasises the potential of alternative strategies which empower the participants so they become the ones to make demands on the HE institution:

> *Youth Views has begun to challenge this by forcing it to open its doors to non traditional students, giving them access to facilities such as computers and making the university accountable to ethnic minority communities.*

Finally, Chapter 12 brings us back to the knowledge construction debate at the beginning of this introduction and the purpose of a more accessible HE for a wider public. It discusses the findings from interviews which explored the idea of universities amongst adults who had been involved in a community based, non award bearing, widening participation initiative. The sense of distance these participants felt from their notion of the university environment contrasts with the personal and educational gains they made as a result of their learning experiences. This chapter raises questions about whether the instrumentalist learning with 'performance driven and vocationally linked systems' will generate the kind of enquiring mind so valued for HE; it also challenges the conventional framework for academic topics as the only means of HE study.

All the chapters, to a greater or lesser extent, advocate collaborative, inter-agency alliances. Not all are success stories; many are at a development or evolutionary phase and analyse the issues associated with that phase. Many, but not all, discuss pre-course access or recruitment initiatives. All, implicitly, or explicitly, raise questions in relation to what equity means, what kind of HE we should be providing in the future and for whose benefit. Many stress the cost of development and the price of change – cultural and economic. The case studies also show, however, what is possible and how creativity and diversity can stimulate new opportunities.

These papers unashamedly defend the principle of widening participation. They highlight the potential for, and role of, HE in cultivating critical, reflective minds across wider society. However, for future participation trends to include 'different' rather than 'more of the same', goals need to be built into HE policy at a funding, strategic and philosophical level. The issue of sustaining participation in the mainstream may require further research into how curriculum content and teaching and learning styles can be developed; this includes research into the long term guidance and development needs of individual learners. All of these strategies can only be nurtured in a clearly defined context – that is, what kind of HE we are looking for (Tuckett, 1996) and for whom (Ball, 1996; Hague, 1991), with a recognition that what seemed impossible a generation ago is common practice in the here and now (Ball, 1996).

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Section 1

Exploring the boundaries of guidance

Chapter 1

Mind the gap: widening provision, guidance and cultural change in higher education

Rennie Johnston and Fay Croft

Widening provision projects can be seen to be operating within several different higher education (HE) cultures. On a broad historical level, we can identify the open access, flexible learning culture of 'new' universities, where part-time adult students are often in the majority and experiential knowledge is valued highly in relation to a university mission with a strong vocational orientation. Alongside this culture is a more elitist 'old' university culture where the student norm tends to be school-leavers with A level qualifications, where knowledge is understood more within traditional disciplinary boundaries and part-time adult students are less prevalent except for those concentrated in designated departments of adult/continuing education. One of the underlying aims of the national widening provision project could be seen to have been to bridge the gap between these different cultures and to provide opportunities for 'new' and 'old' universities to learn from each other and to cross-fertilise in the broad area of increasing access to a developing mass HE system.

Of course, the divisions identified above are an over-simplification of the situation as neither 'new' nor 'old' universities are monolithic and within these broad historical divisions a variety of different sub-cultures operate. This paper seeks to develop a case study of one such sub-culture and identify the extent to which a widening provision project in general and the development of student guidance in particular, can (and cannot) bridge the gap between three different but overlapping cultures operating in one particular 'old' university: a liberal adult education culture and tradition largely around traditional academic subjects; a social purpose culture and tradition with its emphasis on community outreach, equal opportunities and experiential knowledge; and an over-arching university culture with its investment in disciplinary knowledge, pre-occupation with elite standards and boundaries and its explicit mission to be a top research-led university. The first part of the chapter will explore in greater depth different aspects of each of the three cultures identified above and trace the tensions between their different values, practices and organisational contexts. The second half of the chapter will look at how a widening provision project with an emphasis on guidance has started trying to bridge the gap between social purpose and liberal adult education cultures, identify the emergent issues arising from this and focus on one specific initiative which attempted to move beyond the boundaries of community-based, social purpose education. It will conclude by considering the possibilities and problems of influencing mainstream university culture in the longer-term.

Liberal adult education

In the development of adult education in 'old' universities like Southampton, a dominant influence has been the liberal tradition. Fieldhouse summarises its basic values thus:

> *The notion of 'liberalism' in English adult education implies a democratic, dialectical and non-utilitarian approach. It is democratic rather than authoritarian with students enjoying the right to choose what and how they study. . . It is dialectical rather than propagandist, with a total freedom of discussion of all subjects. And it is non-utilitarian, non-vocational in that it is concerned with education of the individual either for personal intellectual advancement or to make the individual a better citizen (Fieldhouse, 1992: 11).*

At the heart of the liberal adult education tradition is an understanding of education as initiation of the free and rational person into disciplinary knowledge and scholarship, a particular concept of adulthood which stresses the individual's potential for ever-increasing autonomy and social agency and a vision of adult learning as a means towards self-actualisation and the development of an informed and critical citizenry. This liberal tradition has shaped the culture and working practices of departments of adult/continuing education like Southampton which have often been dubbed the 'off-licences' of universities, agencies through which scholarship and traditional knowledge were offered in a more accessible form to a wider population, still semi-detached from the mainstream university.

A major criticism of such an approach to learning and knowledge is that, despite its worthy ideals, in practice it has not recognised sufficiently the influence of 'cultural capital' on the take-up of learning opportunities or the dynamics of the learning process. University liberal adult education has been seen to have a social and cultural location where its students were predominantly well-educated, middle-class and white – in theory open to all, but in practice attended only by those comfortable with a certain type of university ambience. Certainly, its emphasis on 'education for its own sake' has been criticised for ignoring the more instrumental interests of working-class people and its approach to non-traditional students has often been seen to equate cultural difference with cultural deficit (Thompson 1980).

What makes the Southampton context especially interesting is the fact that an arch-critic of university adult education has been Jane Thompson, once of the Southampton Department, who has described the organisational culture of liberal adult education as 'the historical construction of patriarchal attitudes' (Thompson 1983). More specifically, she has written about attempts in Southampton to vet her radical feminist teaching approach where:

> *The full weight of the Department's liberal tradition rallied behind notions of 'educational neutrality', 'academic objectivity', the 'tutorial tradition' and a highly particular (ie, dead, white, male, middle class and European) selection of knowledge and culture confirmed as 'truth' (Thompson 1996: 81).*

While the rights and wrongs of this episode in Southampton's history are still much-disputed more than ten years on, it perhaps highlights the ideological and cultural terrain (and battle-lines) surrounding the liberal tradition in one particular department of adult education. It also presages differing approaches to access in the mid 1980s and beyond, where liberal adult educators were largely happy to adapt to the development of Access-type courses, seeing them as both a (traditional) induction into disciplinary knowledge as well as an (instrumental) preparation for mainstream HE. They were, however, less actively concerned with reaching out to engage with new and different types of non-traditional student. This may have some resonance for the contemporary task of widening provision, albeit in a re-structured department in a much-changed HE context.

Social purpose adult education

The social purpose tradition is in some ways a development of the liberal tradition but with an emphasis on the collective, a vision beyond the geographical and epistemological bounds of the campus and a focus on local educational action as part of a more participatory citizenship. Fieldhouse shows both its link with the liberal tradition and its difference when he identifies its aims as:

> *Providing individuals with knowledge which they can use collectively to change society if they so wish, and particularly equipping members of the working-class with the intellectual tools to play a full role in a democratic society or to challenge the inequalities and injustices of society in order to bring about radical social change (Fieldhouse 1992: 11).*

In a university context, Ward and Taylor have promoted an understanding of social purpose adult education to recognise five aspects of social structure which reproduce inequality, namely education, gender, race, age and geography (Taylor 1986: 4) and to adopt two guiding principles: the necessity for in-depth, preliminary groundwork and dialogue to ascertain the real, felt needs of specific target groups in the wider community and the development of community-based provision relating to emerging social issues rather than conventional academic subjects (Taylor and Ward 1986: 172).

Whereas a traditional liberal adult education culture has been criticised for assuming a certain type of individual and for seeing cultural difference as deficit, such a social purpose approach explicitly recognises difference and actively reaches out to community settings. In place of a conservative concentration on disciplinary knowledge, it also values the learning that comes from experience, including the experience of inequality, marginalisation and oppression. A key question in social purpose adult education is 'Access to what?' Primary concerns are with accessibility to educational ideas and structures and a pro-active form of equal opportunities involving dialogue with adults from under-represented groups, as much as possible on their terms.

This tradition has also been criticised: for being over-optimistic and over-rhetorical in the stress it places on education changing society; for dealing too much with second-best community-based experience and knowledge which does not inter-relate sufficiently with dominant (and powerful) conceptions of knowledge; and for ignoring the new realities of an increasingly instrumental and credentialised national educational culture – if liberal adult educators staffed the 'off-licences' of university education, then social purpose educators may be only offered illicit fare in shebeens.

Looking again to the Southampton context, there is a history of community-based, social purpose education, albeit with differing underpinning ideologies (Fordham *et al* 1979, Thompson 1983, Johnston 1987). However, the Department's growing concern with access since the 1980s has served, perhaps paradoxically, to further marginalise social purpose work, where, within an increasingly-powerful and reductionist 'bums on seats' philosophy, it is still ascribed value in theory, but in practice, by 1995, had been relegated to the exclusive province of one academic. Certainly, the idea of social purpose adult education may well be seen by some departmental colleagues, new to the discourse of adult education, as being out-moded, inappropriate, even 'precious' within the brave new world of accreditation and funding targets.

The availability of specific funding for widening provision offered CE departments like Southampton the possibility of combining the strengths of liberal and social purpose adult education approaches and traditions in the wider goal of widening access to HE. With this in mind, the Department developed a bid which combined community outreach, the identification of progression routes from community guidance and provision, and guidance and support for non-traditional students on recently mainstreamed and accredited HE programmes. Such an initiative promised, within a rapidly-changing HE context, a greater legitimisation for community-focused education, some continuing acknowledgement of a social purpose value base and the prospect of bridging the cultural gap between liberal and social purpose adult education.

Mainstream university culture

Before charting this bridging process, it is necessary briefly to explore another culture with a powerful influence on any widening provision project, that of the mainstream university. The ending of the binary divide has prompted a wholesale rush by all universities to re-position themselves in the HE market-place. Like a lot of 'old' universities, Southampton is seeking to do so through research excellence, prompted by a vice-chancellor with an explicit mission to turn it into one of the top research-led universities in the country.

Alongside such a mission goes a strong identification with and investment in traditional academic standards and an elitist culture of 'selecting out' students in contrast to a widened provision concentration on 'selecting in'. One indication of Southampton's general attitude to non-traditional students is that, discounting the Department of Adult Continuing Education, the proportion of mature students accepted into Southampton has consistently been lower even than the average for 'old' universities (Johnston and Croft, 1994).

The above information places the aims and aspirations of the Southampton widening provision project in context and raises particular questions about the embedding process so dear to the hearts of HEFCE. It is to this background that the Southampton project set out to attract more non-traditional students to recently-accredited courses, develop new guidance and support structures to meet their particular needs and circumstances and so bridge the culture gap between the liberal and social purpose adult education traditions in the Department of Adult Continuing Education, as well as look for ways of influencing the approach of the mainstream university to non-traditional students.

Bridging the gap in the department

A key aspect of the Southampton widening provision project was the development of a comprehensive student guidance and support system designed to deal with the growing requirements and demands of a changing departmental student body resulting from the move to a fully credit accumulation and transfer system (CATS)-rated accredited programme of courses. The departmental guidance and support system is founded on the principles laid down in the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC) report *A Quality Assurance Framework for Guidance and Learner Support in Higher Education* (1995) which seeks to offer guidance, advice, counselling and learner support, both practical and academic, in ways which ensure confidentiality, impartiality, equality of opportunity and accessibility. Educational guidance from course directors and the student guidance co-ordinator is supplemented by practical advice and assistance for example through departmental bursaries offered through European Social Fund (ESF) funding or by encouraging and developing student access to wider university services like the library, computing services, counselling and careers guidance.

Particular guidance initiatives have been geared towards attracting and supporting non-traditional students: community and campus-based advice and guidance; short taster courses; an extended programme of study skills support; additional bursary support for books, carers and travel; pilot schemes of peer support and mentoring; enhanced student monitoring. Outreach work through the project has also sought to forge identifiable progression routes from the local community and link social purpose concerns with accessibility, equal opportunities and experiential knowledge to liberal adult education traditions of disciplinary knowledge, experience with older students and encouragement of learner autonomy. These guidance developments, allied to the pressures of student recruitment targets, have already, to some extent, bridged the gap between the different traditions in the department and give its liberal adult educators a stake and an interest in new and different students.

The move towards accreditation has meant a rapid and wholesale change of culture for the Department including developing university quality assurance procedures and a more intensive focus on assessment and progression. It has meant working with new adult students, often younger, more aspirant and diverse than the previous liberal adult education norm and with significantly different guidance and support needs. It has also involved attempts to incorporate previous community-based students, once catered for through largely discrete social purpose initiatives, into a mainstream accredited programme. These developments now offer students a much clearer way forward through the HE system, in effect, meeting earlier-identified criticisms of the non-vocational 'drift' of liberal adult education. Of course, they also involve a fundamental change of purpose and level for community-based provision with the effect that much of the earlier targeted social purpose work with certain social groups cannot readily be converted to credit-bearing courses and hence has been lost.

At this stage it may be useful to focus in some depth on one specific initiative which attempted to move beyond the boundaries of community-based social purpose adult education and bridge the gap between such work and more mainstream accredited provision. The initiative in question involved developing small-scale research with specific target groups, identifying their particular aspirations and learning needs and setting up follow-up taster/guidance sessions which would offer them the opportunity both to find out what kind of educational opportunities were available and to assess their own interest and suitability for them.

The initiative was in line with accepted community adult education good practice. Specific target groups were identified that were disadvantaged and under-represented in further and higher education: young adults from black and ethnic minority groups; registered unemployed adults; and single parents and parents on low income. The research was conducted in collaboration with community-based practitioners who already had contact and credibility with these groups; that is, an Asian youth worker based in the inner city area, an advice worker at the local unemployed centre and two female practitioner/researchers supporting single parents. Overall 143 interviews were carried out (roughly 50 per target group). All interviewees were asked if they would like to attend a follow-up, community-based taster/guidance session.

This whole action-research process raises a number of issues about trying to move beyond the boundaries of community adult education and trying to bridge the gap between this working context and accredited part-time HE. In research terms, the interviews generated very valuable data on respondents' personal aims and aspirations (varied), new skills or knowledge sought (mixed), barriers to educational access experienced or perceived (extensive), educational information and guidance known or used (often very local); and their perceived image of the university (largely indifferent if not actively hostile). Much of this provides a baseline for further community-based developments, for example, in tackling barriers to access, improving local information and guidance opportunities and in trying to change the practice and image of the university. In action-research terms too, the fact that 38 of the interviewees took up the offer of a follow-up taster/guidance session was a positive outcome. At these sessions, student aspirations were explored further, individual plans clarified and access routes facilitated.

However, in terms of the narrower, more instrumental aims of widening provision, that is helping non-traditional students to move into HE, the research project's achievements were very limited. Only a few interviewees, almost exclusively those already in touch with educational institutions, were interested or ready to move into HE, even in a very tentative way. What was crucial to the taster/guidance sessions were the links the project had established with other providers, in that most people were interested in access to further education, very often for essentially practical motives, or even basic skills provision.

This whole initiative raises a number of very important issues associated with moving beyond the boundaries of community-based provision and bridging the gap between non-traditional students in the community and HE provision. In more optimistic and developmental terms, it could well be seen as a useful first step that has succeeded in raising the profile of the project in local communities and identifying areas for further project development. Certainly the Southampton project sees it in these terms. However, in shorter-term, cost-benefit terms, it appears to have little to show for its efforts and can be difficult to justify, both to a department focused on increasing/retaining student numbers and a university not very familiar with or sympathetic to such forms of research. In terms of the aims and objectives of the national widening provision project, it also raises questions as to whether projects geared to non-traditional students might not be better framed, funded and developed as collaborative efforts between the FE and HE sectors, rather than as a specific HE initiative.

The above case study highlights a number of problems and issues in moving beyond the boundaries of community-based, social purpose adult education and bridging the culture gap with the part-time HE opportunities offered by the Southampton Department of Adult Continuing Education. But the Department too, in catering for a growing number of non-traditional students, has to engage with cultural change and try to move beyond both the old liberal adult education custom and practice to address the new imperatives of accredited HE. A key issue here is that of ***open enrolment***. The Department has retained its long-established policy of open enrolment, in effect 'selecting in', although this is now coming under pressure from two different sources. On one hand, a university quality assurance system rooted in the tradition of 'selecting out' has made it difficult for the Department to offer any programme which is seen as being less rigorous than similar level courses in other specialist departments. On the other hand, the gradual influx of non traditional students, a relatively new experience for many staff, especially in the context of HE assessment, has imposed extra demands on course directors and tutors in recognising the diverse range of ability and experience of these students and catering for the particular cultural adjustments and study skills problems they encounter in HE. A series of study skills workshops, no matter how good and extensive, may not be sufficient to prepare some students for the rigours of undergraduate study. When this is allied to the loss, through funding changes, of the Department's own well-established access-type courses this makes it difficult for many non-traditional students to be sufficiently prepared (and vetted?) in-house for HE study.

With the above pressures, it is increasingly difficult to reconcile the dual demands of rigorous assessment and student-centredness so that non-traditional students are neither screened out too early nor given false hopes as to their ability to progress within HE. Certainly, there is emerging evidence that some non-traditional students are not yet ready for university study. The current way forward is to allow open enrolment on individual units but control registration for awards through an interview. However, tensions are increasingly apparent here within a rapidly-changing departmental culture and they have considerable implications for the widening provision project and for the development of student guidance, equal opportunities and staff development.

Another central issue is ***equal opportunities***. The earlier part of this chapter sketched out the different perspectives on equal opportunities of the liberal and social purpose traditions. The Department has a long-standing equal opportunities group which has tackled issues like disabled access, gender issues, the use of language, etc. However, as is often the case in organisations, the rest of the Department has given largely tacit support to its efforts without having to engage actively themselves with equal opportunities issues. A move to attract more non-traditional students now means that course directors and tutors cannot remain so isolated from equal opportunities practice. With this in mind, the widened provision project and the departmental guidance co-ordinator have begun promoting staff development activities designed to help part-time and full-time staff work more equitably and effectively with a wider range of students. However, much still needs to be done in respect of dealing with difference. A recent, ultimately successful, attempt to put on the cover of the departmental prospectus a simple message of welcome in the main community languages generated surprisingly strong opposition and feelings amongst some colleagues. This points to fundamental differences in attitudes towards equal opportunities measures designed to promote accessibility for ethnic minority students and so change, even in a small way, certain aspects of a residual liberal adult education culture.

Another important and problematic issue for widening provision and guidance is that of the place of ***experiential knowledge***. In the first place, powerful University traditions of disciplinary knowledge, emphasis on academic validity and ignorance/ suspicion of vocational/professional knowledge and experience make it difficult to set up more vocational programmes likely to appeal to new, more aspirant students. In the wider university there has been considerable resistance to the valuing of experiential knowledge, to the extent that the departmental scheme for the accreditation of prior learning – only the second in the university – has had to operate within very tight academic constraints. It is therefore difficult and very time-consuming to allow credit for students' prior experiential knowledge. This is particularly ironic when the old-established (and much less rigorous?) practice of admission of students through advanced standing continues to be practised at university and departmental levels.

Bridging a wider gap?

The bridging of the gap between the liberal and social purpose adult education traditions within an accredited HE system is not an easy one. However, progress has been and, with continuing goodwill, is likely to continue as staff and students between them explore and incrementally change departmental culture. Perhaps the main stumbling block is the attitude of the mainstream University. A major question must exist about the possibility of attracting, teaching, guiding and supporting a significant number of non-traditional students in a university so clearly focused on other, more powerful, and potentially overwhelming, priorities. Indeed, the relative modesty of the original Southampton widening provision bid was a direct result of fears of incompatibility with a conflicting university focus on research excellence.

It is difficult to develop community-based guidance and progression routes for non-traditional students when the above-mentioned project research has shown that targeted groups like adults from ethnic minority groups, single parents and unemployed adults have a poor image of the University. And it is difficult to attract new students when the University, despite much prompting, has as yet no articulated policy of progression to degree level for department students nor any systematic way of recognising the different needs and circumstances of adult or part-time students in the University as a whole. However, all is still not lost. Within such an apparently difficult situation, there are still allies that can be sought out, strategies that can be developed and national policy developments like a growing (if sometimes over-narrowly focused) emphasis on lifetime learning, new funding methodologies and the impact and recommendations of Dearing, Kennedy, Fryer and the 1998 Green Paper on lifelong learning which can be built on.

Strategies for the future

Within Southampton University progress has already been made in developing access to university-wide support services, although further work is still necessary to ensure that these are sufficiently adapted to the needs of part-time, mature students. The project and the Department can capitalise on the uniqueness within the University of its guidance service and its obvious advantage over the current practice of support from identified personal tutors, often with neither the time nor the inclination to offer guidance to students, whether non-traditional or not. Progress can be made through on-going contacts with sympathetic colleagues and wider staff development processes, fuelled by Teaching Quality Assessment (TQA) criteria and a growing recognition of the need to attract and retain more local students.

These developments within the University are linked to continuing outreach and collaboration at a community level and the embedding of the post of student guidance co-ordinator into the Department. Indeed, this embedding process will now be taken one step further with the integration of the Department of Adult Continuing Education into the newly-established University of Southampton New College. Guidance is likely to be at the centre of New College with its explicit mission of '... providing programmes and modes of study appropriate to the needs of students of diverse cultural and social backgrounds ... (and) opportunity for lifelong learning for Southampton, the region and the wider community'. The question, of course, remains to what extent this will impact on the wider university community. However, progress may be possible through judicious dissemination and development of project findings in terms of guidance and support structures, inter-agency collaboration and raising awareness of the preparatory work necessary to attract and support non-traditional students.

Cultural change in HE is taking place at a fast pace, often in a haphazard and unpredictable way. This chapter has sought to trace some of the processes, problems and possibilities of cultural change in the context of a particular widening provision project within a particular university culture. The aim has not been to tell a success story but rather to provide a critically-framed case study of practice which might provide food for thought for other projects and practitioners as well as highlight areas where the Southampton project needs to learn from and collaborate with colleagues involved in similar ventures.

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Chapter 2

Extending the guidance boundaries: an exploration of educative and empowering guidance strategies for learners who have been long-term unemployed

Ann-Marie Houghton

This chapter seeks to explore some of the questions about where guidance boundaries begin and end. It demonstrates what can be achieved if higher education provision is tailored to accommodate personal and social needs of new learners. The context for this is an open entry, part-time, community development programme at Lancaster University for a group of long term unemployed adults. Before progressing to a detailed examination of the Lancaster project it is worthwhile considering what constitutes guidance in this framework.

What constitutes guidance? Approaches to guidance and learner support

To ascertain if the boundaries of guidance can be extended I feel it is important to clarify features of traditional guidance. It is now widely accepted that educational guidance includes the seven activities drawn up by Unit for the Development of Adult Continuing Education (UDACE, 1986). These activities are informing, advising, counselling, assessing, enabling, advocating and feedback. The typical mode of delivery is a one-to-one interview that includes some of these activities and is conducted in accord with a range of underpinning principles, which the Higher Education Quality Council (HEQC, 1995) amongst others, have listed as a learner centred experience, confidentiality, impartiality, equal opportunities and accessibility.

Regardless of the mode of guidance delivery there is no guarantee that guidance throughout an adult's life will automatically fit into the linear model described by HEQC (1995) and others (FEU, 1995; Woolfe *et al*, 1987; McNair, 1996). However, for the duration of this programme students did follow a repeating cycle, moving through the pre entry, entry and induction, on-course and ultimately moving on guidance phases.

At the outset I would wish to acknowledge that many of the attributes of good quality educational guidance can only be delivered via the conventional model of a one-to-one interview that involves the appropriate use of the relevant guidance activities previously described. Nevertheless, when starting my role as community development support tutor in January 1996, I was motivated by personal and anecdotal evidence from practitioners working with non-traditional groups of students to explore the potential merits of alternative techniques for delivering guidance.

Consequently for the purposes of this discussion I shall focus primarily on guidance strategies delivered in the context of a group and explore how they can be used to enhance the educational experience of adult learners. Whilst many of these strategies will feature in adult education courses it is their use and recognition as guidance and learner support tools which I believe extend the boundaries of guidance.

Community Development Programme

Lancaster University's Community Development Programme (CDP) was a 2-year match-funded European Social Fund (ESF) project (1995 – 1996), seeking to widen the opportunities of long term unemployed adults who reside in rural or economic objective 3 (ESF) areas of East Lancashire and South Cumbria. The programme was delivered by the university's community access programme (CAP). The programme has a commitment to attracting people into higher education who would not otherwise consider doing so. Within this remit is a research element to provide new insights and knowledge about learning amongst socially excluded groups. I had overall responsibility for guidance within the programme and was, during 1996, responsible for the management of the community development programme. This chapter contributes towards disseminating insights gained as a result of the CDP with particular reference to the guidance strategies used.

The CDP consisted of three phases:

- access courses with Lancaster University's foundation credits attached – these are 30-hour courses, which concentrate on transferable skills, and for this programme included personal development, study, computer and IT and investigation skills
- university level 1 certificate courses with 10 or 20 credit accumulation and transfer (CAT) points attached – these included youth work and equal opportunities, adult education and community development, community enterprise, rural development, environmental action and parent school partnerships
- a work placement of 150 hours, in a community setting which involved the production of an evaluative diary.

Students

Students with diverse educational, life and employment experiences expressed initial interest in the CDP. The profile of those who ultimately enrolled on the programme in 1996 resulted in a group whose ages ranged from between 22 to 54 years, comprised of five women, 15 men and included two students from minority ethnic backgrounds and two who identified at the start of the programme that they had a disability.

It is often easy to fall into the trap of assuming that the needs of individuals from within a homogeneous group sharing a common status, in this case unemployment, will all face the same barriers to their participation in education. One of the students on the CDP for example wrote on an evaluation form after the first course: 'It is difficult to comment on course content as the needs of all unemployed people are different. . .'

So whilst the students did appear at times to share many of the attributes outlined by McGivney (1990); Woolfe *et al*, (1987); and NIACE (1990); it became clear that each student also brought a unique set of challenges and experiences. These were to influence their ability to participate in the course. Of the attributes listed by McGivney (1990: 86) those of social deprivation, fear of losing state benefits, isolation, a lack of confidence, and other psychological effects of unemployment were to influence both the programme itself and in particular the guidance and learner support package provided.

Pre-entry phase

Publicity: information about the course

All students who eventually enrolled on this course had responded initially to publicity displayed in job or community centres, local newspaper press releases and a local radio interview. Informing (UDACE, 1986) students about the course may be regarded as both a marketing and a guidance activity. However in this context, I consider it to have gained guidance status because the focus of the publicity was broader than just this course. Publicity was designed to encourage those seeking or considering a change in their life to come forward for a chat and gain further information about this course and other educational opportunities in their local area.

The inherent tension as a course provider with responsibility for guidance and learner support throughout the programme (which I was obliged to keep full of students) was inevitably present. Nevertheless guidance principles (HEQC, 1995; FEU, 1994a) were adhered to, wherever possible, and the needs of the individual students remained paramount. This task was made easier because of local knowledge about other opportunities obtained through my role as development officer for educational guidance.

Attending for interview

All potential students were provided with brief written details about the programme and asked to attend an informal interview in Lancaster, where they would be able to have a chat about what they were looking for, talk about their previous work including community experience and have their questions about the course answered. It was often the case that those who enquired about the course were seeking a solution, or in some cases reluctantly following a lead, or instruction, offered or pressed upon them, by a job club. Inevitably people arrived for this first interview with a range of different expectations including hopes and fears about the course; a notion of the university and a view of their own capability.

For some of the students many of the practicalities of attending a course had not been considered prior to this interview. Consequently a realisation of what might be involved, together with information about other options, resulted in them deciding not to enrol – which I believe to have been a positive and informed choice (Alloway, 1987). For others the challenge of travelling long distances or working alongside people from different backgrounds (two issues discussed with all potential students) was not to become a reality until it had been experienced!

Entry and induction phase

Enrolment process

The enrolment process comprised a number of guidance activities (UDACE, 1986), some of which were compulsory and deliberately included, for example, the pre-enrolment interview. Other activities that were optional, emerged and were refined for those who joined the programme later in the year. These included: various methods used for informing; individual assessment of personal goals or needs; advice to enable action planning and in some cases advocacy in the form of referrals to other agencies.

Although guidance issues at this stage were still discussed during a conventional one-to-one interview there was a conscious decision to make clear the purpose and potential relevance of each guidance activity. This approach was to prove cost effective in the long term as it enabled me to lay the foundations for future group guidance activities and concurs with Johnston (1992) who stresses the importance of relevance when working with adults, especially those who have been unemployed for along time. Time spent making guidance activities visible – and thus extending the boundaries of the one-to-one guidance interview which is often constrained by pressures of time or funding criteria – for example the GATEWAYS voucher scheme (LAWTEC, 1995), was largely due to the funding arrangements of this project.

Induction

Based on the experience of my colleague's 1995 induction session, and learning from this experience, a whole day was allocated for induction to the CDP. Objectives for the day included:

- providing the students with opportunities to familiarise themselves with the facilities, each other and key members of staff with whom they might have contact throughout the year
- explaining the various channels of communication which would be used throughout the year, including a group notice board, individual folders for handouts, course and institutional information.

There were also several practical activities and fact finding tasks relating to academic and personal needs; for instance, locating the city library and perhaps more importantly where to buy milk for tea breaks!

Guidance throughout the induction phase continued to extend its boundaries by becoming part of the learning process (McNair, 1996) and not just a means of helping students. In other words, an educative process (Killeen, 1986) whereby students began to recognise and learn the skills to help themselves.

Because feelings of isolation and a lack of routine are commonly referred to by those who have been unemployed for a long time (McGivney, 1990; Woolfe *et al*, 1987) group guidance activities were used in the initial stages to allow individual's concerns to be voiced and group members encouraged to proffer possible solutions. These activities which focused on issues relevant to the students made a valuable contribution towards creating an atmosphere of trust where individuals could feel accepted (Dadzie, 1990). In addition I felt it was vital to create a sense and feeling of community spirit, especially as the programme lasted a year and would conclude with students working in community settings and as members of other communities.

On-course guidance

On-course handbook

At the start of the course further information in the form of a course handbook was supplied, together with an interactive quiz sheet based on the handbook to ensure students engaged/interacted with the material and to avoid the familiar cry: 'I didn't know about that,' or: 'No one ever told me.' This proved to be an effective activity as it provided opportunities for students to write down questions, query what was presented and alerted myself as support tutor to any misunderstandings – which I was then able to address.

Feedback (UDACE, 1986) from a guidance activity was thus utilised to plan further guidance and provide evidence of understanding (HEQC, 1985). Whilst we sought to avoid the trap of overwhelming students with too many choices (Cooper, 1991) and too much information (Fazey, 1996) the exercise using the interactive quiz sheet highlighted potential pitfalls, associated with relying upon written information as the sole means of communication. In spite of carefully worded course documentation the need for further explanation to clarify each accreditation option became evident. From this experience we may conclude this is likely to become an increasingly familiar problem for modular-based programmes. Possible solutions, like Greenwich's 'Routeplanner' (McNair, 1996) and the use of an interactive quiz, to encourage and support students in fulfilling their responsibility to use written information (HEQC, 1995) would therefore seem worthy of consideration.

Relevance and readiness for guidance

It was to take students some time before certain practical and academic issues could be admitted, aired and solutions explored by the group. For any provider there is a dilemma of what, when and how guidance and education should be delivered. Johnston (1992) stresses the need for relevance. In concurring with this view I would also wish to emphasise the benefits of making clear the relevance of information and the purpose of guidance activities. It is all too easy to assume, like the HEQC (1995) guide-lines, that students know what their learning and support needs are, and have the confidence and skills to avail themselves of services the university or educational institution has provided.

On-course guidance activities

Guidance and learner support issues during this phase were identified during some of the formal compulsory activities, which included individual interviews, small group discussions, whole group brainstorming sessions, and question time sessions. In addition, the more spontaneous and informal coffee time and early morning or end of the day conversations highlighted emerging on-course difficulties which might be resolved during lunch time guidance meetings for interested sub-groups or by the preparation of additional information sheets.

Other guidance activities used to explore specific on-course guidance questions included: role play with follow up evaluation; modelling particular strategies (for example, contacting a potential work placement agency) plus a variety of group work tasks and presentations made to and by the group to convey and elucidate information provided in the work placement handbook. These strategies not only delivered information in a variety of formats but also were particularly useful in assessing the individual and group interpretation and understanding of the material provided. As this programme was about community development many activities had the added benefit of enabling students to develop their own communication skills.

The range of guidance activities illustrates how the role of expert guidance (Killeen, 1986) is extended beyond the boundaries of informing and advising (UDACE, 1986) about a specific course or opportunity, and becomes an educative process (Killeen, 1986) with individuals being encouraged and empowered to become more active in their own educational decisions.

Compulsory versus optional guidance

On-course guidance followed the format of earlier phases with a combination of compulsory and optional guidance activities. By making some guidance inputs compulsory, students were enlightened about the possibilities, and more enabled to seek further optional guidance to assist them in tackling barriers to their own learning.

Unlike earlier phases a significant proportion of compulsory guidance was delivered to the whole group. Regular group sessions were usually scheduled for after lunch. (Finding a mutually convenient time when students wouldn't be absent due to family or signing on commitments was not always easy!) Both the format and purpose of the session depended on the emerging needs of the students. For example, a session on dealing with the Benefit Agency consisted of:

- brainstorming difficulties already experienced
- small group work producing a flip chart of ideas and possible solutions
- whole group discussion which concluded with an action plan for members of the group, including myself.

Subsequent group sessions allowed findings to be shared informally. Members of the group were able to support one another and recognise they were not alone in dealing with the Benefits Agency, or problem of fitting study in with their family commitments. Individuals were also able to arrange optional guidance meetings to discuss their personal situation more fully.

At key points throughout the year compulsory guidance and learner support days were timetabled to deal with specific issues, when the agenda was normally determined by myself. There were sessions prior to and after the work experience and in the middle of the student's holiday and work placement. One of the objectives for these mid event days was to minimise the feelings of isolation that had been reported during a feedback session with the 1995 cohort.

Throughout the programme opportunities for optional guidance sessions were arranged for individuals or small groups who shared a common issue they wished to discuss more fully. For example, some students had expressed an interest in finding out about progression routes into higher education. This issue was discussed informally by this small group, with prospectuses being made available. It was then decided to invite the admissions officer to come and give further advice and information.

Delivering guidance in a group context

The notion of educational guidance delivered in a group setting may seem alien to many who believe that guidance should be client centred. How can the needs of so many clients or students be served by grouping them altogether? Whilst there may be some truth in this view the group guidance constituted only a part of the whole package and focused largely on the guidance activities of informing, enabling and feedback. This approach also afforded the students, individually and collectively, an opportunity to address a wider range of guidance issues. Furthermore it provided students with a visible opportunity to offer feedback – to make a difference to the provision they and future students received. Feedback in the form of evaluation of individual courses has resulted in changes and modification to subsequent provision.

The community development programme was designed with multi-entry and -exit points. Group guidance sessions provided a framework for this on going process enabling some students to review their own progress, share some of their insights with new students and for all to identify their next step or personal goal. Throughout the year members of the group have been able to share their local knowledge or experience of dealing with staff from the Benefits Agency, etc, and learn from one another.

This collaborative learning process has resulted to some extent in the empowerment of the students (Johnston, 1992) which became a goal for both small and whole group guidance sessions and was particularly apt in the context of a community development programme which sought to equip students with both the theory and practice for working in a community environment.

End-of-course guidance

They think its all over – it is now!

Perhaps it was only as students approached the end of the course that they were able to assess their progress and identify new skills gained throughout the course. Again mixtures of individual and group guidance activities were provided, with the purpose of each being made clear at each stage. Activities included:

- a self-assessment questionnaire to enable students to plan their next set of learning objectives
- an individual guidance interview in order to discuss future plans and, as appropriate, provide sources of further information
- group and individual evaluation activities to allow students to provide feedback (UDACE, 1986) about the course and in particular the guidance and learner support package.

Extending the guidance boundaries through the use of educative and empowering guidance strategies.

Reflections in this chapter are based upon personal observations made throughout the year, informal interim feedback from students and formal comments made during an end-of-programme evaluation. The objective of providing guidance, which sought to be both educative and empowering, was a personal one which I believe extends in a positive way the more conventional guidance boundaries. It is therefore satisfying that the benefits of this approach seem to have been supported by student feedback. As one student explained: '[We] got some very good advice . . . [tutorials] gave clarification, [tutor name] listened to us'; and another: 'A lot of useful things came out in tutorials, we discussed new things'.

However, typically, there was one exception; a student comment which I feel highlights a challenge facing guidance providers committed to using educative and empowering strategies: 'It didn't seem to matter if I carried things out what we discussed, so often we were just going round in circles'. Two questions emerge. Firstly should I have insisted the student completed each task, removed the freedom of choice not to take advice and implement the action plan discussed during a tutorial? Secondly, if I had, what would have been the positive and negative effects for this student in the future?

The activities used to deliver the guidance and learner support package for the community development programme have not in themselves extended the guidance boundaries. In fact the guidance activities used (UDACE 1986) have been typical of those used regularly in one-to-one guidance interviews by staff based at institutional and independent agencies nation-wide. I believe that where and how the boundaries have been extended is in their application – the mode and context of their delivery across four inter linked continuums. Figure 1 provides a diagrammatic version of this process.

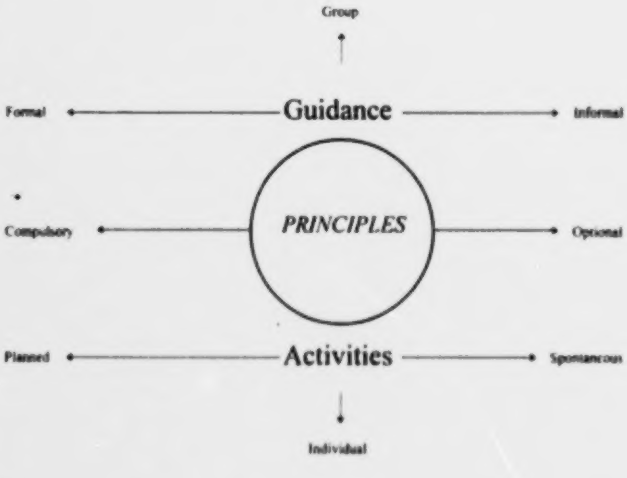

Figure 1.

The exercise has only been a first step in exploring the relationship and educative effect of combining different modes of guidance delivery. Nevertheless I have found that certain combinations of modes are helpful. For example:

- compulsory, planned and in a group – are helpful when tackling feelings of isolation, sharing ideas, creating a supportive and empowering environment
- informal, optional and individual – are helpful for dealing with specific issues, clarifying issues raised in the group.

If guidance is to be seen as a life long process and an educative activity (Killeen, 1986), students should experience a variety of opportunities for gaining insights and information from a range of sources. Assumptions are often made that students are equipped to ask the right questions; interpret the information provided; assess whether a course meets their particular needs and are competent to complete application forms, enrol on a course of study and participate in that course of study (HEQC, 1995; FEU, 1994b; McGivney, 1990). In many cases this is a mistaken assumption and inevitably a dangerous one. Problems can occur not only for the individuals concerned, who may find themselves trapped in a course ill suited to their needs, but also for the tutor, who faces a group of students with diverse expectations and potentially a high drop out rate.

Conclusion and lessons to be learned

Whilst this chapter has focused on the range of guidance provision in one particular course, a number of issues do seem to have wider application and may merit consideration by those reviewing their own guidance and learner support packages. For those who have reached the pre-entry phase the HEQC guidelines do provide a flexible framework for discussing the guidance needs of potential students and how these might be met. However, I would advocate that in considering when guidance is provided there should also be some attention paid to how it is delivered. At this point in time the four inter-linked continuums outlined in this chapter provide a tool which may be applied to any programme of study. These continua would seem to be particularly helpful where the programme is modular, and/or the student cohort includes learners with a multiplicity of educational and life experiences. However, from my experience, it should be noted that non-traditional students are likely to need extensive guidance support over and above the expected norm. This is an important point providers need to consider when recruiting onto mainstream programmes.

Engaging students to take an active role in the guidance process also encourages analytical thinking which is seen by many to epitomise good university education. Practical activities including the interactive quiz, modelling student presentations and induction sessions described in this paper can no doubt be adapted to meet the needs of individual courses and longer programmes. I would also commend obtaining comprehensive feedback from existing students, as this is helpful during both evaluation and future planning of a programme's guidance provision.

Guidance is more than simply helping. If students are to be enabled and empowered then they need to be afforded help and, perhaps more importantly, the opportunities to acquire the skills, ask questions, interpret, assess and make their own decisions.

In this chapter I have summarised the guidance activities used for a group of long-term unemployed adults. By extending the boundaries of guidance and adopting a more educative approach I feel students have not only been given information and advice, but also encouraged to develop their own skills so that in the future they can obtain information for themselves.

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Chapter 3

Disadvantaged youngsters: raising awareness, aspiration and access through a summer school

John R D Blicharski

The 1990s may enter the history books as the decade in which promotion of lifelong learning grew rapidly. For some, however, barriers seem to preclude moves towards a learning society. In particular, the effects of disadvantage on young people who wish to continue their education beyond school still causes concern for many in higher education. Research carried out in the UK (Burnhill *et al*, 1988 and Paterson, 1991) suggests that disadvantage can indeed have a profound effect on the likelihood of some young people converting their ability into qualifications. It would appear that a number of factors, either individually or in combination, can prevent students from even considering further study, never mind actually committing themselves to several years of study.

Even if such a student aspires to the goal of gaining a degree, their chances appear to remain slim. UK data from 1995 (UCAS, 1995) indicates that of all applicants accepted for degree-level study in Britain, 75 per cent come from social classes I, II and IIIN and only 16 per cent come from social class IIIM (those who have parents in skilled manual employment), seven per cent from social class IV (those who have parents in partly skilled employment) and two per cent from class V (those who have unskilled parents). Such findings seem to suggest that, in the UK at least, there appears to be an inequality in access to university-level educational provision. Whilst the UK has now recognised this fact (NCIHE, 1997), it has proved particularly difficult to do anything about it. The last few decades have shown that social class distribution within higher education is remarkably stable. This chapter documents, as a case study, one specific intervention that has been implemented in and around a Scottish university, and explores the difficulties which those wishing to implement similar programmes are likely to face.

In Scotland, students sit examinations during their fourth, fifth and sixth years at secondary school. In 1995 some 28 per cent of Scottish school leavers entered full-time higher education, largely as a consequence of the grades that they attained during the momentous days of their 'Higher' examinations. UK universities recognise that Higher examination results are a good measure of ability and consequently accept suitable passes as undergraduate entrance qualifications. Whilst the examination system makes some allowance for acute incidents that might disadvantage pupils come examination time, it is clearly not possible to compensate for a lifetime of disadvantage. The result is that many otherwise able students do not obtain the entrance qualifications they need, leaving their ability untapped by the higher education sector.

During the late 1980s and early 1990s, concerns about educational inequality led to a series of 'access summer schools' being set up in Scotland. These, although differing in detail, all aimed to help disadvantaged students make better use of their abilities. In 1992, research (Johnston, 1992) conducted around Dundee, Scotland suggested that it might be possible to devise a course by which the University of Dundee, in partnership with local schools and councils, could help address the effects of disadvantage and so promote non-traditional university entrants to better use their talents. As a result of this research and in an attempt to promote equal opportunity, the University of Dundee decided in 1993 to run an annual, 10-week course for disadvantaged students aged between 17 and 24 years. Subsequently three local colleges and a new university also joined in, allowing each summer school applicant to be offered a course likely to meet their specific needs. The consequence of this high level of local support was that a culture in which access students are seen as being important stakeholders has developed. Although the term 'access' continues to have many different meanings, for an increasing band of Scottish students, it has developed a familiar and practical meaning which we shall now explore.

The need for access summer schools

Discussion of why access summer schools are necessary has been fundamental to the establishment of courses across Scotland. Pupils, schools, colleges, universities and local government agencies all have their own viewpoints of why (if?) special intervention for disadvantaged students is needed. At a time of local government cutbacks, such views tend to diverge as spreading overstretched resources becomes harder and harder. Fortunately for the scheme based around Dundee (in the region previously known as Tayside), many students were determined to have benefited from the pilot courses, so ensuring that with the arrival of local government reorganisation, sufficient political and financial support continued. This was possible largely because the views of all those with an interest in access have been regularly shared and a team approach taken. Team members identified the following five reasons for a special access summer school being necessary.

Equality

As we have seen, at the moment disadvantaged students do not appear to enter and progress through university as well as they might. To disadvantaged youngsters unfamiliar with higher education, university often seems a daunting and out-of-reach proposition. Many able students simply reject the university option despite being qualified for tertiary education (*The Times*, 28 August 1995 and 18 January 1996). It is also recognised that once within higher education, without suitable guidance, the degree potential of many disadvantaged students may be unable to fully develop. Despite the best efforts of schools, some students are brought up in a culture that does not value education as much as it might. Through access summer schools, students who missed the traditional route to university can now redirect their potential and begin to catch up.

Addressing disadvantage directly

The University of Dundee course is specifically designed for students who have had their educational development 'held back'. In selecting candidates from the large number that apply annually, several factors are taken into consideration. Some students have experienced a single acute 'catastrophic event' that has profoundly altered their lives. Others have spent their lives clearing a succession of hurdles which their circumstances have placed in front of them. To allow the course to identify these kinds of factors, a range of 'access criteria' were devised – one or more must apply to all applicants accepted for the course:

- little or no parental experience of higher education
- limited family income
- unskilled, semi-skilled or unemployed parent(s)
- living in neighbourhood or other circumstances not conducive to study
- educational progress blighted by specific family events at critical times (bereavement, illness, separation or divorce)
- other exceptionally adverse circumstances or factors specified by nominating institutions.

Typically, successful applicants conform to two or three of these factors – for some all six apply. Care is taken to ensure that students affected by more disadvantage than can be tackled during a 10-week course are guided to more gradual or modular courses at other institutions where, if trouble strikes once more, they may be more able to recover. All applicants to the course currently lack university entry qualifications and are consequently unlikely to be able to enter degree programmes during their teens/early twenties. All applicants must, however, possess the potential to benefit from and cope with the course, and ultimately the degree programme they wish to embark upon. Details are confirmed through a careful application process which includes a supporting academic/social reference. Eligibility is further confirmed via interview – every applicant (there were 128 in 1997) is individually interviewed by a trio of university and senior school staff.

Recruitment

Recent years have seen shortfalls developing in the numbers of traditional entrants wishing to enter certain subject areas. Attracting non-traditional students has been seen by some as one method of plugging admission gaps and simultaneously ensuring that all academically able students (not just those with the right paper qualification) are attracted towards university. Access summer schools can be seen as an ally in this process, providing tried and tested candidates for undergraduate entry. Summer schools are mechanisms by which prior experience or learning can be assessed and interpreted into an undergraduate offer.

Student quality

Academic staff within higher education appreciate that a huge section of life experience can be lost when marginally underqualified students, particularly those who have done other things between school and university, are turned away. What is also clear is that teaching staff enjoy working with highly motivated students. Very often, access students exude 'drive', having only recently been shown that their options are not as limited as they feared. Working with such students is highly rewarding.

Retention and progression rates

Many institutions now recognise that changes in the funding of degree-level study has meant that success at university can no longer be assured by good academic qualifications alone. As mentioned above, familiarity with 'life skills' is increasingly becoming an important indicator of student progression. Access students are, by definition, rich in these skills and, if they can overcome the hurdles that have previously blocked their progress, often display an admirable level of determination to succeed.

Key ingredients of an access summer school

Most students attending the University of Dundee Access Summer School (UDASS) come from the local area which contains around 30 secondary schools, three colleges and a new university (all of whom are involved in Summer School). An extremely high level of local co-operation has developed, helped greatly by the fact that local councils embraced the concept and offered students limited financial support whilst attending the course. This remains extremely important as it helps make up for loss of benefit and potential employment. Practical experience has shown that there are six further key ingredients to the success of the course.

A broad range of assessed subjects

Internal monitoring has shown that many access students value the opportunity to try subjects before they embark on full degree level courses – summer schools allow them to do precisely this. For example, in 1996 at the UDASS, 14 different subjects were offered – each student selecting three which they studied over 10 weeks. Each subject (typically averaging around 35 to 40 hours of class time) allows students to explore subjects that they may have studied already or, if they prefer, completely new subjects or indeed a mixture of both. All subjects are delivered at university entry level by the same staff that students may encounter if they progress to first year undergraduate studies. The breadth of course choice ensures that combinations of subject passes act as acceptable alternative entrance requirements to all five faculties of the University.

'Taster' options in further subjects

The UDASS encourages students to gain an insight into subject options that they may previously have ruled out. This, monitoring has shown, is of particular importance to students whose family and friends may not identify with university, resulting in students artificially limiting their subject choices due to lack of information and encouragement. Consequently, each year students attend nine one-hour introductory talks on nine additional subjects. Once again, monitoring has shown that this has resulted in students ultimately making better informed subject choices when they enter undergraduate degree programmes. Furthermore, as a consequence, students report a greater feeling of confidence towards their undergraduate studies and lose less time through making mid-term subject choice changes.

Compulsory personal transferable skills course

We have observed that the aspect of educational development which is most often afflicted by disadvantage is that of personal transferable skills. Access summer school students frequently report feeling ill-equipped for sustained university study. Consequently the university has specifically developed a course which focuses on this precise area. Thirty-six hours are dedicated to introducing study and communication skills, encouraging self-assessments of strengths and weaknesses, teaching students how to learn, encouraging students to take responsibility for their own learning and introducing students to the study facilities available. A 'dual' delivery is used, with both discrete and integrated skill-based work being carried out. Simultaneously, students see personal skills development in a practical 'I will need to be able to do this because. . .' setting.

Guaranteed places

Before entering the UDASS, students know that if they pass all three subjects they have chosen then a guaranteed undergraduate place awaits them. Following the model put forward by Scottish Wider Access Programme, the UDASS ensures that every student who passes the course can proceed directly into the degree area of their choice.

Student support, guidance and counselling

On arrival, each new student receives a detailed student handbook, outlining the 10 weeks of activities ahead of them. Undergraduate and postgraduate students (including ex-UDASS students) are hired and trained each year to act as personal tutors and student leaders. Whilst the former deal with academic issues through weekly timetabled meetings, the latter are on call throughout the working day and provide more personal, practical and social advice. Between them, the personal tutors (approximately one tutor per 20 students) and student leaders (approximately one leader per 35 students) aim to give seamless help and guidance, providing a friendly 'everything you ever wanted to know about university but were afraid to ask' service. These staff also act as an interface between students and full-time, fully qualified, university support staff who are also on call. Our experience has shown that disadvantaged students are surprisingly reluctant to ask for 'official help' and without a bit of coaxing from student leaders may not ask at all. Last, but certainly not least, the work of the university counselling service and the student advisory service is introduced to all students – beginning an open door policy that will continue throughout their undergraduate and postgraduate lives.

Money management, careers advice and residential components

Most students find the ever-increasing financial pressures they face a worrying aspect of their undergraduate lives. At the summer school, we try to tackle this problem head-on. The full-time University of Dundee expert on grants, loans, etc, has fixed slots in the course timetable – initially acting as a provider of general information and subsequently inviting much more detailed questions about form-filling and the like. In 1996, the access summer school hardship fund was set up to provide more direct financial assistance.

The university careers service also provide a 'getting to know us' session which all students attend, once again followed by unlimited advice. Individual official help is supplemented by a pre-course briefing event and two parent evenings at which family members are encouraged to find out what their offspring are doing. Further social events, including arranging for new students to meet those on the previous course, reinforce the bonds of help and friendship.

From the inception of the course, it was recognised that the domestic circumstances of many disadvantaged students are more likely to promote a desire to be independent and live away from home. For some, studying at home is simply not an option. To address this potential problem, a week-long supervised 'taster stay' in halls of residence in the third week of the UDASS was built into the course. This has proven very popular and beneficial both academically and socially – some students gain dignified privacy for the first time. In extreme cases, students with no other home to go to have been placed in halls for the duration of the course.

In terms of using university facilities, students at the summer school receive identical rights and privileges as their traditional counterparts – they matriculate, have full use of the library, computer suites, sports facilities and student association. These become prized possessions and add to the feeling of belonging.

Course delivery and monitoring

To date, four annual summer schools have been run at the University of Dundee. All classes are delivered by university staff familiar with both undergraduate provision and the special needs of disadvantaged students. Whilst final exams count for 50 per cent of the total mark, continuous assessment is used for the remainder, so giving the University a measure of student performance under sustained workload. The entire operation is overseen by a full-time Director (the author). During the first three pilot years, the course received annual external evaluations which resulted in three extremely detailed reports – essentially blueprints for each successive year. The summer school now has an external examiner and extensive internal monitoring is carried out. Furthermore, a board of studies meets regularly to look at all aspects of the school and the 50 or so staff involved in delivering the course. Each year, all students who completed the course filled in a detailed questionnaire, responses from which follow.

Course achievements

Over the last five years, some 323 students have benefited from the summer school, which has a 96 per cent completion rate. All students leaving the course are tracked – the progression rate through our institution for the 1995 cohort (now mainly in third year) is 91 per cent whilst for the 1996 cohort (now mainly in second year) it is 80 per cent. For the 1997 cohort (now in first year) the retention rate is 100 per cent. As such students report that the 'shock' of first year is often their biggest hurdle, the progression data bodes well for the future.

When the 68 students who completed the 1997 course were asked about the benefits that the course had offered:

- 100 per cent said it had helped them to analyse themselves as a potential undergraduate
- 100 per cent reported that it gave them a clearer understanding of life as a university student
- 96 per cent said it helped them decide whether to continue in education
- 98 per cent said that it had helped them to organise their studies

- 98 per cent said it helped them decide which courses and subjects they might study at university.

Around 58 students from the group of 73 who started the 1997 course have now entered university, two deferred entry, two entered employment and three entered college. The remaining seven students will be located as part of our ongoing tracking. Taken together, experience at the University of Dundee has shown that a carefully devised summer school for disadvantaged students can change the lives of the young people it enrols. The overall retention rate of these students within the University is currently 92 per cent. To quote students talking about the course during a recent radio interview:

> *It feels brilliant. It has given us a wonderful opportunity to experience new and different things – really tremendous.*

A second student commented:

> *Initially I was completely stressed out and thankfully I've learned how to deal with stress and find a balance between studying and my social life. I think if I'd started first year I would have probably folded.*

A parent observed:

> *Had my daughter finished school four years earlier* (ie, before UDASS started) *she would not have been given the opportunity to put the problems and failures of school behind her.*

Growing pains

The last few years have seen significant changes in funding – the course now relying much more heavily on charitable donations as local councils have seen their level of resource reduced. Should further funds be made available, many more disadvantaged students could be systematically helped towards the education previously denied to them.

In 1996 there were significant changes for local councils which had a dramatic effect on local summer school provision. Three new local councils found it much harder than their larger combined predecessor to find the resources the course required. Whilst uncertainty may have deterred a few potential candidates, the councils did a magnificent job in ensuring that, in the circumstances, as many students as possible could be helped.

Despite significant funding reductions, enthusiasm amongst all concerned continues to be high. The feeling that there is now a level of expectation in the local community, coupled with the effective infrastructure, has been enough to maintain the momentum. High-level institutional support has now begun to be supplemented by the development of a reputation which has resulted in personal recommendation by former students and family members becoming an important referral mechanism.

The course has seen a significant increase in demand, which seems likely to continue. General uncertainty about the benefits of a university education versus trying to get a job, together with local school mergers, seem likely to increase the number of pupils leaving school underqualified for university admission, but none the less having the ability to study for a degree. Future demand for the course seems secure whilst the University of Dundee continues to benefit as a result of research the course has enabled.

Learning our lessons

Whilst the logistics of using a summer school to help raise awareness, aspiration and access will vary, several themes are likely to be common to those wishing to set up their own course. Firstly institutional support at the highest levels is essential. Asking staff to exchange vacation time for minimal reward may not be well received and needs to be carefully managed. Furthermore, disadvantaged students will, at the start of the course, have a wider range of abilities than many higher education staff may have previously encountered. The students may find the environment especially alien – factors which do not mitigate towards them being an easy group to teach. That said, teaching staff report feeling especially rewarded by the often exponential growth which such candidates display once their disadvantage has been neutralised.

Running the course itself is very labour intensive. The author, as full-time Director, has little time throughout the year to carry out 'non-summer school' duties. The annual course for 70 to 90 students requires a full-time leader/co-ordinator if it is to deliver the quality of learning that the students require. Any less, and elements of the course need to be sacrificed. If there is one golden rule that must not be broken, it is that after raising the aspirations of disadvantaged students then failing to deliver must be avoided at all costs.

Support and guidance are other areas that simply cannot be skimped on. Factors which are used to determine eligibility also affect how much support individual students require. Those recovering from a specific acute episode may need a lot of initial guidance after which they rapidly become much more independent. Those with more long-term difficulties require more constant support. Whilst such generalisations are broadly true, continuous monitoring of all students is essential. If something upsets a student whilst on the course they will not have their familiar surroundings to comfort them and so may feel even more distressed.

Finally, the experience of running a summer school is particularly special and amazingly rewarding. Quickly word spreads and families, friends and the community at large get involved. The glow of accomplishment ensures that every Scottish summer is a bright, warm and enjoyable time for all concerned.

Acknowledgement

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Chapter 4

IT-based guidance: reaching the parts that other guidance cannot reach?

Irene Chapman and Sarah Williams

The report produced by Sir Christopher Ball in 1990, *More Means Different*, proposed that universities should aim for growth by attracting students from age and social groups that were generally under-represented, rather than simply aiming for higher numbers of students who conformed to the characteristics of those already participating. The current Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) widened provision initiative is a response to this proposition, funding projects which research and develop innovative approaches to attracting students from a wide range of under-represented groups. Many of these projects include strategies for educational guidance activity that supplement or complement existing institutional activity and yet a survey conducted early in 1996 through NIACE (the national organisation for adult learning) has confirmed that mature adults, who form the target for much widened provision work, do not necessarily approach institutional guidance services for information and help on educational matters. They are likely to seek advice from a range of organisations or individuals with whom they have an already established relationship. Employers, friends, general advisory bodies and service providers in the community may all be consulted on educational matters because, for those who do not traditionally participate in adult learning, it is more important to consult a known and trusted adviser than someone who is unfamiliar, no matter how expert. The need for universities to network with and make use of this broad range of formal and informal advisers when developing guidance strategies has already been recognised (UACE, 1996).

At the most basic level this may simply result in having access to the locations and premises that the community can offer to export an institutional guidance service. However, the most effective use of community networks may lie in assisting others to provide sound educational guidance as part of their own diverse activities. The latter is an essential element of the model that Coventry University has adopted for its own outreach adult guidance activities. The University has sought guidance partners from a wide range of organisations with different perspectives on, and levels of responsibility for, guidance work with adults. The resulting network encompasses voluntary bodies from both the host and ethnic minority communities, library and information services and Local Authority and Training and Enterprise Council organisations, as well as other guidance, education and training providers. Working within this network, the University has identified two distinct ways in which information technology (IT) can strengthen and enhance guidance activity. The production of interactive software packages to support guidance undertaken by others, and the use of video-conferencing to export an institutional service are both being explored through the widened provision project.

Those who are approached for guidance in a community setting, whether part of voluntary, statutory or employing organisations, are in far better positions than colleges and universities to respond to the diversity of personal needs of intending learners. The organisations which make up Coventry University's guidance network are able to offer familiar and comfortable environments for beginning guidance with adults from many different backgrounds and cultures. They recognise that providing guidance advisers who speak the same language, both literally and figuratively, will help to overcome some of the barriers that members of their community might face in accessing guidance advice. However, the process of drawing out information about individuals' experiences, getting them to frame their own questions, and reviewing options can be a long one. Workers in community organisations have found that they are inadequately resourced for undertaking what may be a protracted process. They require specific information on educational opportunities and procedures with which they may have little familiarity, especially where HE is concerned. Finding the role of educational guidance giver coincidentally cast upon them as a result of other aspects of their work, they feel a need to be better equipped to provide an effective service.

Discussion with partners has led to a decision that suitable IT packages could have a role to play. Coventry University is, therefore, developing two separate pieces of software, focusing on the early stage guidance activities of assessment and information giving. As programmes will be installed in a range of community venues, where they may be free-standing, an adjunct to other advice giving, or support the guidance given as part of other developmental activity, they will need to be flexible and suitable for use by potential students independently or with minimal support.

Why choose to use IT as opposed to more traditional media? Is there a danger that the technology will pose in itself an extra barrier to access, undermining all the value of placing guidance in accessible and familiar environments? Community partners were quite clear that, since many were already involved in providing IT courses or IT facilities for the public, guidance software would fit naturally and appropriately into their existing activities, if it was designed with the needs of the intended users in mind. The project has, therefore, given careful thought to the structuring of programmes and the levels of computer skills needed to operate them. Screens for these packages have been designed to be uncluttered and undistracting. The style and layout have been repeated so that users can quickly become accustomed to the required actions. Vocabulary is controlled and deliberately repetitive for easy readability. Wherever possible, where questions are to be answered and choices made, menus are provided to keep the need for word-processing skills minimal. Adults who are taking their first steps in IT may be keen to practise new skills if they can find suitable packages and it is hoped that this will be an added incentive to experimenting with the guidance programmes.

The interactive nature of the software has one particular potential advantage. The idea of making personal choices and selections may not be anticipated by those who, on the basis of previous educational experiences, perceive guidance as being told what to do. Through IT they can begin the reflective, questioning process, in control of the pace at which it proceeds and being able to take the time they need, without pressure, to consider what they wish to say. Voice-over has been added to one package to increase the feeling of personal interaction and care has been taken to select a voice that sounds both warm and familiar to local people. As users build up their understanding of the process, with growing confidence, they are better prepared for transfer to more formal procedures in less familiar surroundings. The packages provide some indication of what is likely to happen in a face-to-face guidance interview, and users are alerted to the fact that personal experiences and circumstances will need to be discussed. This gives them the opportunity to get their thoughts together and to be clear about what they would, and would not, be prepared to reveal to a personal guidance advisor. Both packages offer users print-out summaries of the information they supply and details of the agencies able to provide them with further guidance when they are ready. With this preparation adults may be empowered to participate more actively in their first formal guidance encounter, which will lead to a more satisfactory experience and, perhaps, to speedier outcomes.

As packages will be located in community venues it is likely that they will be used by some adults with few existing qualifications. Accordingly, the assessment package is designed to encourage broad reflection on life experience rather than simply reviewing educational attainment. *Make Your Experience Count* takes users through an elementary accreditation of prior experiential learning (APEL) process based on experiences in paid and unpaid work and leisure pursuits. The validity of the APEL process in skills assessment has been debated but there is general agreement that encouraging students to value their achievements in life bolsters self-esteem and helps them to take a positive view of themselves as potentially successful learners. On a practical note, there have been a number of students in recent years who have gained credit towards particular degree programmes at Coventry on the basis of knowledge and skills acquired through experiential learning. In an attempt to address some of the issues of transferability of skills, the programme encourages the exploration of competence and experience in key or core skills such as use of number, team working and literacy. Because the precise identification of level of attainment is difficult, questions related to the amount of autonomy in, and the context for, any particular activity are used to give some level indications. However, structure can only go part way towards achieving an objective assessment of skill levels; the help of an APEL specialist is needed if users wish to gain credit for a specific purpose. Accordingly, they are encouraged to take the collated information, in printout form, back to their own adviser or on to a specialist for more discussion. The programme also suggests that they take time to reflect on and, if necessary, revise information before a subsequent session. Space is provided for them to note down further thoughts at key points on the printout.

The need to create user-friendly IT does impose certain limitations. Concentration on key skills may mean that a specific and important body of knowledge possessed by one particular individual may not be identified. There is a tension between providing some common examples to stimulate APEL, based on activity that would be generally understood, and providing a fully open, student-centred approach. Concerns have been raised about the ways in which the APEL process may reinforce the status quo (Fraser, 1995) and there is a risk that the style of this package, by giving examples and making suggestions, could limit creative examination of experience and imply judgements about the relative values of different activity. However, if the package is able to generate the confidence necessary for individuals to take the next step, there will be the opportunity for an experienced guidance worker to stress the uniqueness of experience and to draw out details of additional, individual achievement.

Trials have taken place in the community and the programme has received an enthusiastic response. Concerns that simplicity might make it boring, thereby discouraging continued use, proved unfounded and participants expressed satisfaction that the programme was easily mastered and consistent in its demands. A small incident also indicates that the software does convey a sense of personal interaction. In trials a user was observed waiting patiently to progress to a subsequent screen when she had completed her selection from a menu. As she did not seem to have difficulties with either the reading or the technology she was asked the reason for her hesitation. She replied that it seemed impolite to carry on until 'the lady' (the voice-over) had finished speaking.

HE for Me? is the working title of the second package which has been designed to support the advising and the informing functions of guidance. In their 1992 study into the perceptions of potential mature students, Keen and Higgins reported that perceptions of many aspects of university education were limited or inaccurate and that more than one third of the adults involved could not identify any source of knowledge about HE. Since participants in that study were specifically chosen because they had a prior connection with higher level study, it is likely that in under-represented groups the proportion of adults lacking even a vague awareness of university education is even greater. This second package is intended to counter this lack of awareness and to encourage users to consider whether HE could be an option for them. The software is structured in three parts, which can be used consecutively or may be viewed independently when time or interest is limited.

The largest section contains 'taster' programmes based on computer-aided learning material from Coventry University course modules. Within four to five screens each taster gives a feel for the subject concerned and conveys something of the approaches taken. Independent, computer-aided study forms a part of many university programmes, although this may not be widely known, so the medium in this case is an important part of the message. Each taster provides a general introduction to the subject and the University school to which it belongs, some interactive course material including a short self-assessment, and some indications of the careers to which associated qualifications might lead. The challenge has been to identify material that is both comprehensible and interesting to the casual browser and also demonstrates some appropriate technical or theoretical aspects of study in HE. The selection and adaptation of suitable material, drawn mainly from level one course modules, has been carried out in conjunction with subject specialists from within the University.

The other two sections of the package are concerned with the needs and interests of individuals. One section covers advice and information on the considerations that adult learners generally find they must take into account when returning to learn, for example sources of financial support, childcare, time management. It also provides specific information related to the modular structure of courses at Coventry University. Most of this is straightforward, requiring no input from the user. Referral points for users to contact for more in-depth advice will be provided. The third part of the package is more personal and has a dual purpose. Programme users are asked to choose from a series of options about their preferred learning styles, where they want to study and for how long, their attitudes to and skills in modern languages and in IT; and any potential motives for study. Each option chosen triggers further information on subjects or study modes which most conform to the preference expressed. Users gain a greater understanding of the requirements and opportunities of higher level study and the range of skills involved as they review the questions. This section forms the opening part of the package and leads into the taster programmes while the information section completes the process by pointing potential students towards the next step.

HE for Me? contains no objective assessment element and does not attempt to match users' existing abilities or qualifications with course entry requirements. Consequently there may be a possibility of raising expectations of participation that it will not be possible to fulfil immediately. However, if the programme can promote reflection about learning and give potential students the confidence to believe that HE is not completely out of the question there will be, as with *Make Your Experience Count*, a basis for further discussion with a guidance adviser and, perhaps, an encouragement to use the APEL package.

To reach the widest range of people possible, it is intended eventually to install these guidance programmes wherever there is a public IT facility for learning or for information giving. Packages are being offered to small- and medium-sized enterprises which have IT learning stations funded by the Coventry and Warwickshire Training and Enterprise Council where employees will be able to access educational guidance and teaching material. They may also be disseminated through a regional information initiative to establish open access information terminals in public places and *HE for Me?* is being piloted in public libraries as well as community venues. The widespread availability of the software is, however, unlikely to be matched by the availability of personal guidance advisors. This creates a need to find ways of extending the University's support for the essential interpersonal aspects of guidance, particularly in those areas where no potential guidance providers are currently present.

For the institution the cost of providing continuing, outreach, face-to-face guidance would prohibit any long-term commitment to individuals who, in turn, could find the expense of travelling to the University prohibitive, so the use of video-conferencing facilities is being explored as a possible solution. Through the widened provision project the necessary equipment has been installed at key community venues within the region, the furthest being some 35 miles from the campus. Two locations are within schools which are in the process of developing their community links and their IT capacity and the third is in a community electronic resource centre, owned and administered by a parish council. No other local advice or guidance services are provided in these areas and initial advertising of educational guidance services has attracted considerable interest.

It is evident how video-conferencing can surmount travel and associated time problems. Equally important for guidance is that video-conferencing has been found to be a medium that allows for immediate interaction which can offer some degree of intimacy (Wright and Cordeaux, 1996). It is nonetheless a relatively new technology and as such may be even more difficult for adults to use comfortably. For this reason, whenever possible, first meetings will always be in person, with video communication reserved for subsequent guidance sessions.

However, it remains likely that exporting a central service, staffed by university personnel, will be less effective in overcoming language and cultural barriers than using guidance supporters from within the community itself. With this issue in mind local advisory groups, which have been established through the widened provision project, are responsible for working with project staff to devise guidance support mechanisms that are appropriate to their own community's needs.

IT is a useful tool for overcoming distance, whether the distance is geographical or cultural or, indeed, distance that is external or internal to the organisation. The process of software development has provided a focus for the widened provision project's guidance networking and has drawn in new contributors and community partners who have helped to ensure that programmes will be suitable for users at all levels. Guidance professionals from other services have come together to advise on the coherence of the packages, ensuring that they are complementary to existing software. University schools have made a commitment to collaborating on the development of the taster programmes and, as a result, have considered the needs of students from social groups with which they may have had little previous contact.

The software offers economical support for a wide diversity of existing guidance activities being carried out in community locations by those who, sharing a common culture, have the greatest insight into, and sympathy for, the needs of excluded adults. In this sense, it will extend guidance to those who currently find themselves outside the cultural boundaries of an HE institution. Through video-conferencing it is possible to contribute to the face-to-face guidance work in external venues and, by exporting aspects of the University's service to potential students, take the service 'beyond the boundaries' of the institution. Nevertheless, to be effective both aspects of this IT-based strategy must be integrated into the broader framework of guidance within the region to be effective. The function of technology is to support, not to supplant, the role of the guidance worker. By making it possible for more to be done, more effectively, in more places, within the human resources available, IT should facilitate a more relevant service to a greater number of those who might otherwise continue to be excluded – to reach some of those parts, and the people, that the existing HE guidance provision cannot reach.

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Section 2

Regional development strategies for widening participation

Chapter 5

What's the point? Questions that matter in community-based projects designed to counter social exclusion and increase participation in continuing education

Colin Trotman and Heather Pudner

Social exclusion in Swansea is of significance to adult educators for its role in discouraging involvement in educational activities and its contribution to the continuation of poverty and non-participation. This chapter will examine continuing education provision in the context of an initiative designed to increase engagement with education by previously under-represented groups in the communities of the Penderry ward in Swansea. The emerging ideas of participatory research (Ansley and Gaventa, 1997) are used to frame the intention of the project to generate a sense of community empowerment and partnership. The original aims of the project were derived from recent developments in ex-coalfield communities such as the Community University of the Valleys (Francis and Humphreys, 1996) and on a revisiting of work done in the 1960s and 1970s (Lovett, Clarke and Kilmurray, 1983) which connected education with community empowerment and citizenship. In the 1990s 'progression' has become the 'buzz' word in continuing education. Thus, an additional consideration in a project of this nature is progression to and within an accredited framework of learning.

In recent years the change from extra-mural 'liberal' higher education to accredited delivery in partnership with other providers and community groups has produced some tricky questions. Who are we delivering to? Where do our students live? Are we widening access to Higher Education? What do adult learners want? Are continuing education providers inadvertently constructing further barriers to participation for previously excluded groups? The Penderry Project attempts to examine some of those questions through radical, reactive and speculative curriculum developments. This initiative is based upon a local 'information gathering' exercise which enables us to acquire the knowledge to develop an approach which is necessary to embed learning in a marginalised community. It also provides the opportunity to examine the dynamics of non-accredited as opposed to accredited provision.

In some of its guises adult continuing education offers a chance to demystify the social world and enlighten participants. If this is to happen then educationalists themselves will benefit from having a knowledge of social and cultural change. They must also acknowledge the extent and variety of change and have an understanding of how these social changes impinge upon people with little access to new sources of wealth. An awareness of what social exclusion actually means to those who are victims of it will help the process of developing useful continuing education. Moreover, as

Ansley and Gaventa (1997) suggest, a 'knowledge system that discredits and devalues common everyday knowledge serves to disempower common people as well' (p 46). This argument, which emphasises the importance of respecting existing ways of knowing, can also be used to define a way of valuing personal self-defence systems and the mechanisms that social exclusion forces people to learn for survival by validating personal transferable skills acquired in less formal settings.

Adult educators are familiar with the notion of 'starting where students are' in order to connect their teaching with students' existing knowledge. To an extent this approach focuses on knowledge of a subject, the void in students' formal educational experience. It sometimes ignores the informal unaccredited skills, knowledge and information previously acquired in non-academic settings. It is in this area that non-accredited educational development work can have a significant impact by building upon those skills. In this sense continuing education can be moulded to be more socially inclusive and less elitist.

The communities of Penderry

It might appear to some communities that their whole social world has been turned upside down in the last 20 years. This upheaval is largely the result of social, political and economic changes which have resulted in structural inequalities which severely limit opportunities and resources within such communities. Whatever the political or economic reasoning the results are that such communities are socio-economically deprived. In this chapter we add another to the list, namely those communities within the Penderry Ward on the outskirts of the city of Swansea. A significantly high proportion of the people living there have working lives that do not necessarily encompass paid employment in the accepted sense. They have different methods of sustaining themselves economically. There are different kinds of families, there are a significant number of one-parent and re-constituted families. Opportunities for well-paid work are few, whilst problems of a financial kind are many. In this area of marked socio-economic deprivation the local environment now appears to be a confusingly heightened mix of poverty, popular culture and increased pressure towards consumerism. People have access to a cultural plurality in their living rooms through their cable television network that largely ignores the prevailing conditions in their immediate surroundings.

The Penderry Ward, with a population of 12,476, is made up of two very large council housing estates and suffers severely from a lack of social and economic investment. The most recent statistics (Office of Population Census Survey, 1993) show a prevalence of low skills, a lack of further and higher education qualifications and high rates of long-term sick and long-term unemployed. The housing developments – which were undertaken in three distinct phases, mid-1950s for Penlan, late 1960s for Blaen-y-maes and in-fill housing association developments in the 1990s – have significance in relation to territorial communities and their impact upon a continuing education development initiative which aims to combat social exclusion. For the outsider it is difficult to tell where one community area starts and the other ends. Boundaries are sometimes framed by subtle, internal, social distinctions not connected with architectural planning. It is imperative that such distinctions are learned quickly because, in relation to the overall education development, there can be repercussions which result from a territorial outlook. Activity in one part of the ward cannot be allowed to alienate another section of the community. Thus, educational activity must, wherever possible, be seen as a response to all members of the wider community and operating across community perceived boundaries. Otherwise, there is a very real risk that the providing organisation will be seen as favouring one group of residents as opposed to another. Through effective development work these internal tensions must be identified and steps must be taken to lessen the threat of alienation.

In the past 20 years the estate has changed and a common perception both internally and externally is that parts have been used to rehouse people with social problems. This has been compounded by a reduction in public transport, the decay and demolition of a proportion of the housing stock and a general collapse in opportunities for work. Several organisations have attempted to offset these problems by funding projects and services. These have the objective of combating deprivation and supporting families in crisis. However interesting and dynamic these developments are they are not providing for the number of people who could take advantage of their help. For a variety of reasons the centres are not fully utilised, and the range of support is not strategically planned to cover the needs of the estates. The wider features of unemployment are obviously not lost on socially excluded groups. Local opportunities for employment that pays more than benefit level are minimal and in the main, those opportunities that are available are of the low paid, part-time, low skilled variety. In the wider regional sense the traditional heavy industry employment has all but disappeared. The coal industry has been decimated and local steel and tinplate production has ceased within the last decade. Swansea has not benefited from the hi-tech industry that has invested in the south east coastal region of Wales. The resulting effects in terms of unemployment, disposable income and social well-being are thoroughly documented (Trotman and Lewis, 1990; Morgan and Price, 1992; Trotman and Francis, 1993) not only in regional statistics but also in the general knowledge of the people living in communities like Penderry.

There is for instance, a relatively high percentage of lone parent households with dependant children which amounts to over 36 per cent of all households as compared to 14 per cent for the city as a whole and 17 per cent for Wales. There are also more children in the 5–15 years grouping and fewer adults in the 45–64 years category. This profile suggests younger parents with higher numbers of children – 18 per cent in Penderry as opposed to 13 per cent for the rest of Swansea for children aged 5–15 – and a higher number of lone parent households with dependant children. There are also high levels of limiting long term sickness and above average unemployment rates.

Of greater significance are the levels of educational qualification. From the census returns the percentage of the population in Swansea as a whole with diploma level qualification is just over six per cent but in the Penderry ward this figure is 1.7 per cent. This division is even greater for degree level qualifications. Whilst these figures alone are a cause for great concern, the earlier identification of high unemployment compounds matters considerably. The cost of participating in continuing education is obviously a barrier for the unemployed. Although there may be some hope in relation to the present Government's 'new deal' and 'lifelong learning' initiatives, it is far too early to tell. However, it is clear from the aforementioned facts that people within the ward must attend to a hierarchy of needs. Quite understandably continuing education is low on their list of priorities.

Participation in continuing education within the ward

In an examination of participation patterns in formal and informal activities it may not be useful to draw a line between what is called 'hobby/leisure' and 'education', just as a distinction between participant and non-participant has to take into consideration that both these distinctions are temporary. People move in and out of activities as their circumstances change and the quality of their learning experiences are not easily gauged from the outside by estimating that one activity is educational and another is just a pastime. Initially, the project focused on finding out what people actually get together to do, with little regard as to whether it is formal or informal.

In addition to the less visible social activities within the ward there are statutory and informal voluntary sector funded meeting places. These include two community centres built at the same time as the original houses, now managed by local residents with the support of the City and County of Swansea Leisure Department. Blaen-y-maes community centre has a managing committee which consists of several people who were there when the centre was built. This centre was the focus of a community development project in Swansea University's Applied Social Science Department 25 years ago. One of the original committee remembered the provision of extra-mural classes in the early 1970s and in order to keep things running all the committee would enrol on all the classes. The enthusiasm that these older members still generate started when the estates were new and they had young families. They still organise a youth club for 140 children despite being pensioners. Respondents identified a missing generation who do not use the centre or get involved in the committee – these are the parents of the young people in the youth club. This centre in common with many buildings on the estates has a defended exterior: the centre committee was compelled to put up security shutters which unfortunately hide a very welcoming atmosphere inside. Penlan North community centre is a well-used comfortable building providing its own curriculum through cost-recovery programmes and tailoring activities to exactly suit its regular members. The profile of users is that of a predominantly elderly group and this is reflected in the activities which take place: for example, a camera club, lacemaking, art class, short mat bowls, poetry group, old time and afternoon tea dancing, disabled club, gardening, bingo and luncheon club. This centre is run by a voluntary committee with support from local authority staff.

Apart from the University of Wales community work project in 1972 there is little historical evidence of adult education classes having been sited in the ward in the intervening years. This absence is not just a question of financial resources. Within a six mile radius there is a College of Further Education, and Institute of Higher Education and a University; all had some historical remit to provide continuing education but were not active in the ward. It is only in recent years that funding bodies have offered additional funding for delivery to areas of high social deprivation and to particular target groups. This has resulted in the increased activity of education providers in the ward of which the Penderry project is only one example.

However, it is clear from the information collected at the end of one year's fieldwork and development that the majority of respondents do not participate in what they define as formal education. This is particularly the case in relation to accredited provision. For students resident in the ward and hesitant about taking part it has been the non-accredited provision which has been more attractive. Participation in non-accredited provision has been encouraging and student numbers have increased during the first year of the project.

Observation in the ward clearly shows that the routine of taking children to school not only provides one of the most vital community dynamics but defines a personal timetable and maps the day for parents and for other people in the community such as shopkeepers, social workers and grandparents. School provides a point at which people can be accessed not only as parents or carers but also as learners. The potential of schools to widen their role has been recognised by a variety of agencies, some of whom have an interest in the effects of social exclusion. Arguing for new schools for the next century, David Hargreaves (1996), writing for the 'think-tank' Demos, advocates stronger community links and more democratically governed schools. Alexander and Clyne (1995) in their report on family education recommend the involvement of FE and HE in the community curriculum of state education. This is not to say that schools in the Penderry ward do not make contact with parents or have ideas of their own. There are several family education projects in primary schools and teachers expressed an awareness of the need for more.

Initial contact with respondents in the form of informal qualitative interviews was made in the first few months of the project. There are facilities for parents of pre-school and reception children to interact with school but take-up by parents is low. Coffee mornings, mother and toddler groups, open door policies and playgroups are among the offerings. The majority of respondents were keen to find ways to increase positive attitudes to education and a commonality which became clear in all the accounts was a desire to help parents engage positively with the school from the early years onward. One head teacher voiced his concerns:

> *It's the lack of control that many young parents have over their lives. I think we need a project that raises self-esteem and makes then think better about themselves (Respondent – Penderry project 1997).*

It must be a tribute to the fortitude and professionalism of such people that they can still take a long view and suggest initiatives of the sort previously outlined. Some of these teachers are teaching the children of former pupils and for the second time around they are returning to fundamental issues such as long-term poverty, low income and their effects in relation to under-achievement. This background information has already influenced the direction which the project must take. One strand of this initiative will link community-based continuing education with parent and pupil educational needs. That is, links will be forged between school and home, pupils and parents, and between children and adult learners. It is evident from respondent interviews that even for the most disillusioned there are aspects of their lives which can be enhanced by continuing education. Quite simply, a significant number will engage with education for the sake of their kids!

Projecting a different future

The Penderry project aims to promote open access to education and encourage social inclusion in a disadvantaged area. Its main objective is to provide a negotiated non-accredited programme that will enable participants to progress to accredited provision. By the year 2000, it is envisaged that part-time degree schemes of study will be delivered in the ward. Working with groups of people who are under-represented in education the project is designed to create clear progression routes and opportunities. The work in the first year has consisted of finding out the facts about the ward and its people, forming viable relationships and beginning to deliver a relevant curriculum. All of these activities have occurred and have witnessed the beginning of a process whereby the Penderry project is embedded into the life of the people in the ward. Realistically, however, the project was examining a standing start in terms of local participation and the creation of progression routes.

The process of introducing the project to the people who live in the ward and identifying the social dynamics of the area called for new relationships to be established with individuals, groups and organisations from the communities in Penderry. Higher education, although not entirely new to the people in the ward, had to be re-described and restructured within the aims of the project. People had to be reassured about the nature of higher education, its suitability, applicability and accessibility. The stereotypical image of it being inaccessible and irrelevant had to be dismantled. Potential students had to be convinced that not only had they a realistic chance to participate but they could make a valuable contribution. Explanations of the non-threatening nature of non-award bearing courses often alleviated individual fear and self-doubt. These are obviously difficult objectives to secure but the flexible criteria for course content and the subject range under non-accredited provision greatly assisted this development. The removal of even one barrier to participation is of obvious significance. In this context, no assessments equal less fear and slightly more enthusiasm to 'give it a go'. In addition, the fact that all provision for the ward is actually delivered in the ward, in various meeting places and community centres, also imparts a sense of ownership. Respondent information clearly states an enhanced sense of ownership. When this is coupled to a negotiated curriculum and subject choice, we have the start of a process which is inclusive and does not function to exclude people.

In this setting the contribution of the project has been to raise awareness of continuing education. Educational development work has brought people together and initiated a more consolidated approach to activities connected with education. The presence of the University through the activities of a community-based development worker has created a set of qualitative transformations, that in the long run will be measured in terms of progression and achievement. The approach has been an inclusive one in that the development work was not confined to educational groups or organisations but attempted to engage the community as a whole. For example, in three community venues the curriculum was designed solely in response to expressed need. Users of a young families drop-in centre, a family centre and a community training centre were involved in consultative meetings to plan their learning This process has a two-fold purpose and was deliberately initiated as a part of the project's aims. Not only does the subsequent learning have direct relevance to the student group but also the process of consultation and guidance promotes confidence in people who have not articulated their learning needs before. This kind of curriculum development is particularly necessary in situations where there are evidently low achievement levels in formal education and where people feel alienated from institutions and statutory authority.

Conclusion

Projects that aim to increase participation amongst previously under-represented groups need to be, amongst other things, imaginative and realistic. Previous educational guidance work confirmed the serious levels of detachment from education and continuing education in particular, in such areas of high social deprivation. Time and time again community tutors and continuing education development workers were confronted by the logical challenge of: 'What's the point?' On the one hand, this lack of interest in continuing education is a perfectly understandable response to the label of 'failure' that the secondary education system had attached to some respondents. They had escaped and there was no question of freely volunteering for a second dose of the same medicine. However, within this apparently negative response, is a thinly hidden shrewdness in relation to opportunities of an economic kind. For many adults, school or education was something to be endured rather than enjoyed. The expectations were that it was a necessary part of the process towards employment. At least, that is how it used to be! Within this realistically narrow conception of the usefulness of education is the present-day understanding that it probably will not lead to employment.

However, it is also the case that particular social groups, like those in the Penderry Ward, have been failed by the education system. It did not work for them, it continues not to work for them. Within the scope of this project the evidence suggests that this has also been the case at further and higher education levels. There is an abundance of published evidence to support this argument (McGivney, 1996). Not only has it alienated them from education *per se*, it does not serve their purposes in terms of the lives they are compelled to live. From the evidence presented by the majority of respondents the compelling question has to be: 'what is it that the educational system does to people to not only alienate them from schooling but to effectively switch them off from education for most if not all of their lives?' This debate must be considered within the context of a ward where the basic skills of reading, writing and numeracy fall below the national average. Thirty-one per cent of the sample tested scored less than the basic standard for a basic literacy test where the national average is 24 per cent (Corporate Strategies Unit, 1997).

More practically, the ills and woes that are everyday life for some people do not lend themselves to positive inclinations towards continuing education, which is a process of long-term participation; a process which requires stamina and motivation to produce progression. It is a process which can be the planned accumulation of credits, or a randomly collected set of experiences and qualifications or a mixture of both. However, the Penderry project is concerned to raise people's expectations in relation to continuing education and here may lie a partial answer to raising participation levels.

There are, it can be suggested, two interconnected strands to raising expectations. The first, on the basis of successful community education development work and collaboration with other providers of continuing education, is provision of a type that addresses their needs as members of a socially excluded group. As has been noted earlier, in a very real sense, control over their own lives is often shared with outside agencies such as social services or local authority departments. The second strand of provision must give them the skills to not only represent their best interests as they see them but also to enable them to make demands of providers of services. The process towards provision at further education and higher education levels must be an organic one. It must be grounded where they are, not only physically, but also bearing in mind their self-regard and circumstances. It must be accessible, of high quality and relevant.

What happens if we only address 'continuing education' in its formal guise, as accredited further and higher education? What happens if we unquestioningly reproduce a 'classic' curriculum and present this as useful and meaningful? What if we do not question why the needs analysis we do produces a well-worn and perhaps out-of-date list of requests? By not enquiring what it is that makes people happy and feel effective and trying to connect our work to the answers, we will not truly locate the extent of our provision where people are carrying out their lives. Neither will we be missed, let alone valued! Participation is not only secured as a result of the students recognising the potential of a programme to increase knowledge and skills it also happens when an activity promises happiness and fulfilment. However romantic this may sound there are testimonies to the truth of such a notion. Many draughty unprepossessing venues are full on wet winter nights with women and men going to fitness clubs and slimming clubs. Some of the most successful community centres provide an excuse for entry such as a cafe or a thrift shop that functions initially in a 'useful way', a purposeful way to use the centre.

Continuing education in this context is a service like any other. What is essential here is the development of an educational process that leads to demands being made upon continuing education, as a service to disenfranchised communities, by members of such communities. Thus, the movement is towards empowered groups participating in a democratised programme of continuing education that is relevant and useful.

Clearly, the questions that matter at the beginning of such a project as this are not readily available. They will only become available as the result of a process which has listening skills at its heart. Furthermore, the process must be democratic and open, we should not assume that we have sole knowledge and ownership of the most suitable resource to engender increased participation in continuing education. In these particular social circumstances we cannot pretend that we know the problems and their solutions or that we can provide the cure. Herein lies the basic importance of issues-based' curriculum development for continuing education. For educationalists this can be a key learning point. For potential students such an approach may mark the boundary between that which is seen as relevant, through their own input to its development, and that which is seen as irrelevant such as the 'parachuting in' of a ready-made subject-based curriculum. Developmental work towards the delivery of continuing education must have relevance to the lives that people are compelled to live out in such disadvantaged areas. However, this is not to ghettoise or ring-fence such communities, neither is it meant to stigmatise. Conversely, such initiatives should be guided by realistic considerations of increasing empowerment. Those who are socially excluded are not just economically deprived and impoverished, they are also denied their full citizenship rights. They do not exercise their full civil and political rights because when people have problems in securing their social and economic rights they are compelled to exercise choice in relation to a hierarchy of needs. Educational activities stand in line with many other activities, most of which, by sheer necessity, have a higher priority in the lives of people who are isolated through social exclusion. Educational under-achievement is only one symptom of such exclusion and as such perpetuates inequality. The circle is indeed a vicious one.

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Chapter 6

As broad as it's long: challenging the limitations of traditional continuing education strategies for widening participation

Cal Weatherald and Geoff Layer

This chapter focuses on the limitations of the traditional definition of continuing education in UK higher education, confined as it has been by the internal boundaries of the education system as a whole.

As well as occupying a central place on the national political agenda, education is increasingly being placed at the heart of regeneration strategies in the regions of the UK. The UK education system has traditionally been defined by a water-tight hierarchy of educational levels, corresponding closely to age-differentiated cohorts. Within higher education, this has been breached by the entry of mature adults through a variety of routes, most significantly in recent years through Access programmes targeted at those who left school with few or no qualifications, and increasingly through growing numbers of what may be referred to as 'post-experience' students seeking to upgrade existing qualifications. Meanwhile, in the school sector particularly, recognition is growing at both primary and secondary level of the need to activate and build on relationships between the generations which are not formally acknowledged in the learning process. This has led to a range of initiatives focusing on family learning and work with parents.

The experience of moving through the education system in the UK is broadly speaking 'comprehensive' until the age of 16. At this point, the division between the compulsory and post-compulsory sectors defines a narrower range of opportunities which are no longer 'comprehensive'. For many years, young people attended school until they reached the school-leaving age, by which time they had the choice of employment, often in occupations traditional to their communities, for example, coal-mining, ship-building, public services. Alternatively, they could stay on at school in the hope of securing more qualifications. For a small minority, the opportunity of university education was available (seven per cent of the age group prior to the Robbins Report in 1963 and up to 14 per cent by 1979). Many who left school for work found themselves employment as apprentices on a long training programme which may have involved attendance at a college on a day release basis. For those in unskilled employment, however, their education tended to end when they left school and there was limited motivation or opportunity for further study. Today, 30 per cent of school-leavers participate in higher education in the UK and the number of 17-year-olds staying on in schools and colleges is over 70 per cent (Secretary of State for Education and Employment, North of England Conference, Sheffield, 1997).

But the profile of those participating indicates that many groups are still excluded. The European Year of Lifelong Learning reiterated the urgency of tackling levels of education, as asserted in the European Commission's White Paper on Education and Training (1995):

> *The countries of the Europe today have no other option. If they are to hold their own and continue to be a reference point in the world, they have to build on the progress brought about through closer economic ties by more substantial investment in knowledge and skills (p 1).*

Current investment is by no means equally distributed:

> *The internationalisation of trade, the global context of technology and above all, the arrival of the information society, have boosted the possibilities of access to information and knowledge for people; but at the same time have as a consequence changed work organisation and the skills learned. This trend has increased uncertainty for all and for some has led to intolerable situations of exclusion (p 2).*

The reality of exclusion has been one of the central strands of continuing education in the UK. For many years, continuing education staff in universities have focused specifically on the needs of excluded adults and provided routes and opportunities for them to return to study. Successful strategies have ranged across extra-mural programmes, trade union education, adult residential colleges, adult education and community education services. Now, perhaps, in addition to these initiatives, it is time to be asking a more strategic question about the necessity of preventing alienation in the first place. This will involve refocusing on communities rather than solely on adult learners, and learning lessons from what are already successful initiatives in community education, further education and school sectors, where strategies are being developed which are inclusive of learners across the generations and across communities.

This will incur a significant strategic shift to extend familiar strategies in recognition of the long-term task, not only to provide compensatory programmes for adult learners, but to contribute to the raising of aspirations and awareness of opportunities from an early age. Some universities have begun this process. Sheffield Hallam University has a firm and well-established commitment to the provision of opportunities for adults returning to education, particularly those progressing onto degree programmes, through Access courses, from working-class backgrounds. Nevertheless, given the scale of non-participation in higher education evident in many of the communities in and surrounding Sheffield, there is an urgent need to invest in new ways of raising the expectations of the young people it wishes to serve.

Some of the developments which have been put in place are now explained, followed by a consideration of some of the strategic issues facing an institution of this nature in seeking to make this kind of change.

The region

The region served by Sheffield Hallam University and its partners comprises South Yorkshire, North Nottinghamshire and North Derbyshire, an area which is both geographically and culturally diverse. It is a mixture of declining industrial conurbations combined with tight-knit mining communities where movement outside is very

C 2

limited and where educational opportunities have to be on the doorstep. The length and depth of the recent recession, together with the decline in traditional manufacturing industries, has tended to reverse the labour demand position, with unemployment rising across all groups and severely restricting the prospects of those less advantaged in the labour market, particularly black and minority ethnic communities.

Low academic achievement has been a marked feature in many parts of the region. This has especially been the case in South Yorkshire, where some school-leavers without traditional qualifications were used to being able to obtain a well-paid local job in coal-mining, the steel or engineering industry. Motivation to achieve academic qualifications, especially amongst men, was therefore low. Even during the recession, the proportion of pupils in the region's schools who remained in full-time education beyond statutory school-leaving age was 43.3 per cent, well below the national average.

Where role models have existed to demonstrate the value of education, the take-up of opportunity has increased. This was particularly demonstrated by the example of women in South Yorkshire who were involved in the Women Against Pit Closures Movement during the 1983–4 Miners Strike, who subsequently entered Sheffield Hallam University as mature students, and whose children then sought to emulate their achievement.

Sheffield Hallam University

Sheffield Hallam University (SHU) is one of the largest universities in the UK, with over 21,000 students.

- 5,000 students are studying part-time
- 30 per cent of full-time students come from the local region
- 52 per cent are over 21 when they first study at SHU
- 44 per cent are women
- 5.6 per cent are disabled
- 12 per cent are black
- 5 per cent come from Access Courses.
- 600 study HE in a local college on SHU programmes.

The University's mission expresses an explicit commitment to widening participation:

> *The primary aim of the University is to enable its students to develop intellectual, professional and practical skills to maximum potential through vocationally relevant programmes of study developed in association with industry, commerce, the arts and the professions. To achieve this aim, the University operates nationally and internationally, but it also has particular commitment to the economic, social and cultural development of the region, and to widen access to higher education with policies based on the principle of equal opportunities (Annual Report, 1995/6: 1).*

The University has invested in providing routes for adults for a number of years, and this development has been co-ordinated by the Division of Access and Guidance. This division, located in the Department of Student Services, is unusual in its remit compared to many continuing education departments in other universities, as it is also responsible for educational guidance and recruitment generally to the whole University. The division both developed from, and sustains, the University's vision of widening participation (Weatherald and Booth, 1996). In the light of this, and of the diversity of its functions, the division is committed to sustaining a coherent team approach to its work.

Its role is:

- to provide and facilitate a high-quality advice, guidance and support service appropriate to the needs of students, both before and on entry, and whilst on course
- to ensure that the needs of students are the major criteria for service delivery
- to encourage the widening of participation in higher education
- to promote equality of opportunity as a guiding principle in student recruitment, service delivery and staff development.

The new approach

The bringing together of a number of previously diverse functions into one grouping enabled the team to review existing provision. In the course of this review, it became evident that the carefully-targeted work with adult groups around awareness raising, group guidance and pre-entry orientation was not reflected in the overall 'scatter-gun approach' to work with young people in schools; yet issues of limited aspirations, low achievement and the cultural disjuncture between working-class communities and post-sixteen education generally (McGivney, 1990) were issues affecting adults and young people alike and transmitted across the generations. What was needed was a broader strategy which would develop these areas of work in relation to communities rather than age cohorts, and which would utilise the existing resources of the University, both human and material, in ways which would underpin the creation of longer-term relationships with the communities currently benefiting least from higher education.

The initial projects have targeted black communities and working-class communities with high levels of unemployment ('black' in this context refers to African, Caribbean, Asian and other visible minorities). There is, naturally, a substantial overlap. Women are targeted in different ways within the projects. A further target group would be disabled people, building on substantial work which was being undertaken with adult disabled students within the university itself.

Black communities

The bridge project

The 'bridge project' is a schools mentoring initiative which targets year nine (ages 13–14) black pupils, and matches them with black and minority ethnic undergraduates from Sheffield Hallam University. Year nine tends to be the time when many young people begin to assert themselves in the educational process. For some, this can have negative consequences if they are not guided through and given the opportunity to learn appropriate coping strategies. It is in this academic year when non-attendance and exclusion rates start to increase rapidly. It was felt that a mentoring scheme introduced at this stage would help to prevent able black pupils from becoming alienated from the education system. Due to the changing environment within higher education, it is even more imperative for young people who choose the higher education option to take the opportunity to progress at age 18. The second chance route is becoming increasingly difficult to pursue due to ever-increasing financial restraints. If pupils decide to delay accessing university, however, it is essential that in the long term (albeit as mature students, or parents) they have a positive perception of the higher education sector.

The aim of mentoring in this context is to help young people recognise and develop their own strengths and skills by talking with adults from a similar cultural background who can bring wider experience and perspectives. The specific aims of the project are as follows:

- to enhance the links between the University, local schools and local black communities
- to provide positive role-models
- to offer ongoing support and encouragement to school students
- to raise aspirations and motivation of mentees and mentors alike
- to provide mentors with an opportunity to contribute to the life of local communities.

The project formally began in October 1995. Seventeen mentors were recruited, all of whom completed a training programme and became recognised certified mentors. The project team then co-ordinated a programme of mentor/mentee activities including:

- an African, Caribbean and Asian schools conference, attended by 121 year nine school children, at which mentors from the bridge project were encouraged to participate as helpers
- an introduction evening, enabling 'bridge' mentors, pupils and parents to meet informally
- 'a day in the life of a university student' – pupils from the participating local school were invited to explore some of the aspects of higher education
- a certificate ceremony endorsing the completion of the training programme for students participating in the bridge project, and also marking the beginning of mentoring relationships with the young people.

The activities were designed to give the project coherence and momentum, and proved an effective way of keeping both pupils and students involved in the vision and purpose of the initiative. To date, the initiative has been warmly received amongst schools and the black community.

Working-class communities

Many of Sheffield Hallam University's mature students are parents, particularly those coming through Access courses. Many of the young people from schools in the communities which generate Access students have parents who left school with no qualifications, for whom higher education had not been an option, and whose awareness of the range of choices available was inevitably constrained in many cases by the limited opportunities they themselves had enjoyed. In concrete terms, many had visited Meadowhall, the large shopping mall on the outskirts of Sheffield, accessible, well-advertised and clearly open to all (who can spend or are mobile) but few had ever been inside a publicly-funded university or indeed had the opportunity to find out about the range of what was offered and who it was for. From a guidance perspective, it was recognised that choice, aspirations and expectations are strongly influenced by family members and significant relationships within local communities. Any strategy to raise awareness of the full range of opportunities available to school-leavers would need to build on the influential role of parents, and other carers. Awareness-raising for these groups had to link in with parents' relationship to the learning process, whether with regard to their own current learning or that of their children. By targeting particular communities, the projects sought to gain an understanding of the aspirations that working-class parents hold for themselves and their children and to develop long-term strategies for widening higher education opportunities.

Three projects developed by Access and Guidance aimed to address the issue of raising awareness and aspirations. The ideas themselves were very simple, but, as simple ideas often do, began to generate a better understanding of the issues both for the University and for those participating. They involved two main areas of activity: the organisation of visits to the University; and active engagement with other educational partners in the development of work with parents in targeted communities. As with the other projects, the work has consciously set out to involve members of staff and academic schools from across the University in delivering the programmes.

Take your daughters and sons to work

This was the first initiative which involved staff from across the University in welcoming young people from a school in a working-class part of Sheffield to spend a day working alongside individual members of staff who were subsequently invited back to the school for a visit.

Horizon project

The aspirations of many young people are well on the way to being set by the time they reach secondary school, and it is at this same point that the presence and influence of parents in the process of learning and choosing opportunities declines rapidly. It is often as parents of primary school children that adults, particularly women, are most open to becoming involved in learning for themselves. The 'horizon project' targeted year six (age 10 to 11) and year seven (age 11 to 12) children in late primary and early secondary school. The aim of the project was two-fold: firstly, to build relationships with parents and other adult members of targeted communities, offering accessible and informal information and guidance on learning opportunities in higher education, organising visits to familiarise them with the University's physical environment; secondly, to develop taster day programmes in conjunction with targeted primary and secondary schools.

The University is experienced in organising admissions open days for both young people (and their parents) and potential mature students, in each case groups who are already on the way to higher education; they understand its role, and have already been awarded the status of 'customer'. Making a university meaningful to a class of 10-year-olds, or an initially suspicious group of women from a local working-class estate where levels of unemployment are high and higher education is regarded as perhaps something of an irrelevance, demands a different response. For the women's group, the visit starts with a cooked breakfast in the student cafeteria and a chance to talk over expectations and first impressions. A number of staff or students from university schools will have been involved in planning the visit and will be prepared to explain some of their work, whether this is about research into the drainage system which underlies the area where the women live, or describing the kind of issues that are explored as part of the Applied Social Studies Programme. Ten-year-olds enjoy a more energetic whistle-stop tour in the form of a questionnaire trail, followed by a number of intensive practical sessions on, for example, surveying (School of Urban and Regional Studies), making a video (Northern Media School), or computer graphics (School of Engineering). As students for a day, they have vouchers with which to purchase a meal (often fish fingers, chips and peas) prepared especially in the student cafeteria, and over lunch talk about what they have seen and what has most captured their interest.

Feedback both from the schools concerned and the facilitators of the women's groups attending has indicated that the visits have had a significant impact and work is now going ahead to tie in the horizon project more closely into local school improvement strategies and community development initiatives which are developing across the region.

Parents as partners

The kind of initial contacts with parents and local communities which have been described are of limited value unless rooted in and connected with long-term focused work undertaken within the communities themselves. From the point of view of the University as currently structured, the most effective way of developing this work is through practical support and encouragement of local community educators. 'Parents as partners' is a Sheffield-based scheme funded jointly by the LEA, Sheffield College and Sheffield Hallam University, and based within Access and Guidance. Collaboration with 'parents as partners' has initiated activities with eight schools in the target areas, resulting in a range of courses for parents groups and weekend taster courses at Northern College; skills development in IT/computers and adult literacy tutoring, and a school/parent multi-cultural curriculum initiative. Within the University itself, these initiatives are beginning to build links with the School of Education and developing discussions about broad strategic collaboration between Sheffield Local Education Authority and the University.

Strategic issues

A key function of Access and Guidance at Sheffield Hallam University has been to act as an agent of cultural and strategic change, both within and outside of the University. This has been made possible by the breadth of activity within its remit and the growing recognition of the connecting issues, and also by its location, as a part of a central university department at the interface between the University and the region through its access and guidance activities. Intergenerational work with local communities in a region as diverse as this demands that responses are varied and reflect different roles and activities within the University. However, four main strategies underpin the work: a commitment to student guidance; active participation in a wide range of local networks; internal collaboration with academic schools, and a role as a central recruitment and support service for all university students.

Guidance

Across the Access and Guidance team there is a collective commitment to learner-centred guidance at all levels, and a carefully-sustained balance of internal and external guidance responsibilities, ranging from early awareness-raising as described in this paper, to learner support for first year students at the University. This wide role means that relationships with academic staff across the University are already well-established. It also means that Access and Guidance is not speaking from the margins, but is in a position to influence the University's strategic development and the nature of its contribution to social and economic regeneration.

Local networking

Prior to the establishment of Access and Guidance, the University's official outreach policy was well-established, but related solely to formal relationships with other educational providers, primarily further education colleges across the region. 'Access' was normally used with a capital letter to refer to higher education preparatory programmes, and 'continuing education' resided chiefly in the post-graduate programmes offered by individual academic Schools. With the establishment of the Division of Access and Guidance, a much wider network of external relationships developed, with both statutory and voluntary organisations. These organisations, as much as individuals, had a limited understanding of the diverse nature of the University, and an important task was to explain the range of its functions and potential local contributions. From this, collaborative partnerships began to develop and a growing understanding of some of the ways in which the University could participate more actively in joint efforts to raise levels of education and achievement within local communities.

Internal collaboration

Universities are richly textured and multi-layered organisations. Academic, administrative and technical staff have their respective roles and areas of expertise, often quite rigidly compartmentalised. Access and Guidance recognised the contribution of these activities need not be limited to academics. Many of the technical staff, for example, are local people with an understanding of the issues which the project was addressing, and have an important role to play. In addition to academic colleagues, therefore, Access and Guidance worked successfully with technicians, research staff, marketing officers and catering staff in the practical development and delivery of programmes.

The issue remains, nevertheless, how to convince powerful and autonomous academic schools with stringent financial targets, of the strategic advantages of building closer links with local communities in the context of social and economic regeneration. Their current function in relation to local communities relates to the implementation of admissions policies for learners whose aspirations are already high. While this is a long-term objective, closely tied in with the future of higher education itself in the UK, Access and Guidance has been able to influence cross-university policies relating to guidance and recruitment in particular, and is seeking to develop a more co-ordinated and strategic approach to the development of part-time undergraduate programmes.

Central co-ordinating role

Because Access and Guidance has a general responsibility for recruitment and student support, it has been able to use its widening participation agenda to influence university practice. For example, the recruitment forums for all admissions tutors have been dealing with widening participation issues for a number of years and it has therefore been possible to access the key staff in the academic schools to participate in the activities. This co-ordinating function has meant that it has also been possible to start translating the principles of widening participation and continuing education to the University as a whole through the recruitment of students.

The strategies outlined in this chapter may as yet represent, in practical terms, no more than a gentle puncturing of the tough membranes between the University and local communities, and between the traditionally-structured learning experiences of adults and young people. What is significant, at this stage, is that the thinking has begun to change, both inside and outside of the University. New partnerships are a possibility, and fresh ways of working collectively to raise aspirations are coming into view, based on ideas of life-long learning which go beyond the compensatory. The value of tying in work with educationally-excluded communities closely with the economic and strategic priorities of the university is not necessarily a contradiction in terms, as explained by Chris Duke (Duke, 1992):

> *Scepticism about HEI self-interest can be set in opposition to values associated with access and flexibility – having a second chance, equality of opportunity. The values often travel these days, for convenience and security, in company with purposes about the economy, or about human resource development. Sound institutional self-interest tends to align with society's needs of its higher education institutions. However, it must also take account of government policy, which in principle represents the needs of society. On universities' longer time-scales the dichotomy between institutional self-interest and society's needs largely dissolves (pp 56–7).*

This chapter's assessment of the long-term possibilities of university strategic development converging with direct contributions to long-term collaborative strategies for local social and economic regeneration in local communities may appear optimistic in 1997. The challenge for university continuing education is to develop ways of influencing the broader canvas of educational achievement and commitment, and of embedding strategies for widening participation within the core academic structures of the university.

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Section 3

International perspectives on equity: lessons to be learned

Chapter 7

Dismantling the barriers: educational justice and access in Ireland

Rosemary Morris and Brian McMahon

This chapter will explore a number of key questions in relation to the pursuit of educational equity in Ireland. The focus will be on participation/discrimination according to class/socio-economic status. The chapter will take the form of a written 'conversation' between its two authors: Brian, drawing on his experience as a mature student from a working class background and Rosemary, speaking as an educational provider. Through this conversation, we will:

- examine the concepts of 'justice' and 'access' in an educational context
- examine what we mean by 'Ireland'
- outline some of the barriers to working-class participation in higher education in Ireland
- describe some of the initiatives which are intended to address the under-representation of working-class people in higher education in Ireland
- suggest some of the means by which barriers and constraints to educational justice in Ireland might be (further) dismantled.

Real accessibility?

BM There is a lot of talk of educational equality these days, but equality seems to mean very different things to different people, depending on their political persuasion and positioning in society.

RM In some ways, the concepts of 'justice' and 'access' might be more useful than that of 'equality', and easier to define and pin down.

Educational justice can be looked at in terms of *doing justice to* people's experiences, abilities, and so on; this implies that it is not enough to just 'grant' entry to those from traditionally excluded communities; rather we must accept that many of those currently outside the formal systems of education have at least as much to offer to the construction of a more relevant, vibrant, challenging educational system and structure as do the 'insiders'. We must *do justice to* the array of intelligence and experiences which exist in the vicinity of the college gates. We must listen to, learn from, and act alongside those whom the higher education system currently ignores, excludes or marginalises.

Similarly, when we think in terms of access, we must remember that to be truly *accessible to* different people or ideas is to be *open* to them in the sense of being prepared to be influenced and to change. Promoting access should *not* mean simply opening gates and letting people in, while resisting any real change in our structures, our thinking, and so on. Accessibility *should* mean a preparedness to accept that our educational institutions may be seriously flawed and in need of radical change – may indeed prove to be a great deal less valuable than those of us who have studied and worked and 'succeeded' within them might like to believe they are. In short, accessibility must mean more than delivering learning to a number of non-traditional students; it must mean the ability and will to learn from the many people who currently cannot, or choose not to, continue their formal education beyond the compulsory school-leaving age.

What do we mean by Ireland?

RM In some contexts, it is presumed that 'Ireland' refers to the whole island, its 32 counties; in other contexts, 'Ireland' is taken to mean the (26 counties of the) Republic of Ireland, we should presumably be clear as to where we are drawing the boundaries.

BM Well, the title of this book is *Beyond the Boundaries*. If we are interested in issues of equity in the Irish context, it is important to acknowledge that the island of Ireland is divided, and to look at partition. In looking at educational equity in an Irish context, we must examine the principle source of inequality – that is, partition – before we can address, in any meaningful way, other area of inequality such as class and gender. 'Beyond the boundaries' implies an internationalist position, one which presumably aspires to a free federation of free peoples. In order that Irish people can determine our own educational experience, we first of all need to be able to exercise political self-determination, free from British colonialism and neo-colonialism. It is surely the responsibility of our educational system to at least acknowledge and address the ongoing conflict in Ireland. Is the concept of educational justice of any real meaning if our educational institutions continue to turn their faces away from this conflict? Yet turn their faces away they appear to do.

'Between one thing and another, Stormont eventually fell.' This is all I learnt about the current situation in the North of Ireland from my university courses. Our curricula, both in second and third level (secondary and higher education), seem to be characterised by a refusal to engage students in any learning about the *causes* of the conflict in the North, even within the context of subjects such as history and social science.

It is a Marxist tenet that the dominant ideology is that of the ruling classes. In an educational context, the southern middle-class ideology is most apparent if one examines historical revisionism. It is true that all history ought to be open to reinterpretation, but within Irish historical revisionism, Britain's colonial interference in Ireland (past and present) is justified and excused. Revisionism has gone so far as to tell us that the famine was our own fault. The higher educational system has apparently taken on board the politics of historical revisionism, and therefore refuses to examine, for example: i) the civil rights movement; ii) internment without trial; iii) the Bloody Sunday massacre and the RUC 'shoot-to-kill' operations; iv) strip searches of women prisoners in Armagh prison; v) the hunger strikes; and so on.

I am suggesting that our educational curriculum is constrained by a cultural colonialism which demands not only the revision of history but also the lowering of national spirit and the destruction of a separate identity. Our cultural identity and language have the capacity to prevent a submergence into an Anglo-American or British cultural ethos, but our formal educational system does not appear to see itself as part of the movement to support this culture and language.

Barriers to working-class participation in formal education

RM I wonder whether the higher education system might become more able to contribute to the pursuit of justice and peace in Ireland if its students and teachers were less heavily drawn from relatively privileged sectors of society? Socio-economic status appears to be a very strong determinant of educational opportunity and success. The Irish National Organisation of the Unemployed has identified unemployment and poverty as the greatest barriers to learning and the major causes of educational disadvantage, north and south (*Examiner*, 25 June 1996). Working-class people remain heavily under-represented in higher education throughout Ireland. Why is this?

BM I left school at the age of 16 during the year that followed the completion of my Intermediate Certificate (school examinations taken at the age of 15). For people of my background, this was 'the thing to do'. My peers were working-class and had left school, so why should I not do the same? Third-level education (higher education) would not, furthermore, have been considered as an option within my household; it was something completely alien. As far as second-level education was concerned, my parents' main objective was trying to persuade me to 'stay out of trouble' with the teachers.

A single incident, however, prompted me to finally make up my mind to leave school. A teacher threw all my books into the bin, disposing of my year's work without my knowledge. The teacher's thoughtlessness, authoritarian attitude, and complete lack of respect for and care about my effort and work made clear for me the gulf between 'us' and 'them', and illustrated in no uncertain terms that I, and the community from which I came, were not welcome members of the formal educational world.

RM Your experience accords with that of many other working-class people, as reported in various research documents. A survey carried out in a working-class community in Ballybeg, County Waterford, for example, found that the hidden costs of secondary education, coupled with peer humiliation of those remaining at school and attendant pressure to 'drop out', were the main factors in early school leaving amongst people from poor backgrounds. The survey also found evidence of discrimination against poorer pupils in school on the basis of their address, and of low parental expectation of children's educational prospects (*Examiner*, 1996b). The National Education Convention made reference to these barriers:

> *Even where [working-class] students may aspire to university entry, both community and peer pressures and anticipated entry difficulties to an essentially culturally 'distant' institution, put such students off* (NEC Report, 1994: 112).

There is, then, little or no 'ownership' of higher education amongst working-class communities.

BM This does not imply a lack of *valuing* of education as such; rather, it reflects a view of the relevance of the educational system as it currently stands to working-class people. The 'middle-class ethos of education, both in terms of curriculum and teaching staff, [is] a major problem' (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1996: 16).

RM Of course, even if cultural barriers are surmounted, financial barriers remain. The maintenance grant in Ireland, particularly the Republic of Ireland, is very low relative to the cost of living.

When we talk about financial barriers, moreover, we are talking not only about ability or inability to finance a student through college. We are also talking about ability or inability to effectively 'buy' a place at college. School books and other resources (computer facilities and so on) do not come free, and some families are obviously able to provide their children with more and better resources than others. Additionally, and critically, it seems that 'grinds' (private, 'cramming' tuition) are part and parcel of Irish formal education; very few students who aspire to a good Leaving Certificate result appear to rely solely on the teaching and support offered in schools; it is tacitly accepted that the Leaving Certificate syllabuses (roughly equivalent to 'A' levels in Britain) are 'too big' for the classroom. This approach to young people's education clearly puts those from poorer homes at a huge disadvantage.

Making change

RM You managed to get back into the formal education system, and to succeed at university. Can we learn anything from your experience?

BM Two individuals were important in encouraging me to reconsider higher education. The first was an ex-political prisoner whom I met at a traditional music festival. He had a degree, and had completed an MA while in prison. The fact that somebody with such a background had gone through the formal educational system finally gave this system some respectability in my eyes. Through him, some years after leaving school, I heard of sociology as a subject for the first time, and I began to consider that formal education might have a value. This coincided with political developments which made it easier for long-term unemployed people to enter the formal educational system, namely the introduction of Third Level Allowance, and the Vocational Training Opportunities Scheme (VTOS). (These are government schemes to help long term unemployed people get into stable employment or to further their education and training).

The second individual who helped me back into the system was a local adult education organiser; he was very encouraging and supportive of my decision to enrol (through VTOS) for an external economics diploma course, and was also of practical help. It was important that I was able to study at higher level within my own community. After two years of part-time study, I had obtained an economics diploma, and was able to apply to enter third-level education. So, role models are important, as are people who are prepared to offer support to students who have previously been undermined or disaffected within the formal educational system. Besides this, there is definitely a need for community-based 'access' provision, and for financial supports additional to the higher education grant.

RM Initiatives like VTOS and the Third Level Allowance scheme have certainly enabled more working-class students to get into college. The problem is that, once there, such students often find themselves in an alien environment with little support, and they don't stay the course.

BM During my time at college, I noticed the tendency for people from working-class backgrounds to drop out after the early months of the degree course. One working-class student (in his forties and married with a number of children) who *did* manage to complete his first year, then failed his exams. This was particularly unfortunate because he gave so much of himself, attending all lectures and tutorials, meeting all essay deadlines, and spending a phenomenal amount of time in the library, always in a panic trying to get this book and that book, to accumulate as much information as possible. This person was so committed, and yet the system failed him when he need not have been failed; all he needed was some tactical guidance which would have enabled him to focus in and to undertake more appropriate preparation for his exams.

RM Certainly college staff – academic and administrative – need to learn more about the specific needs of non-traditional students, and to be prepared to respond to these needs. Study skills support and general educational and personal guidance is not generally built in to third-level curricula, and many very able and enthusiastic students are denied success and enjoyment at college as a result. Access courses do tend to provide study support and counselling, but access provision in Ireland is patchy, with only very few colleges providing such courses.

'Access' is more often perceived in the context of college admissions. A number of colleges have set up alternative admissions procedures, which in the main involve reserving a (small) number of places for students from disadvantaged backgrounds. Students entering the college under the scheme do not have to apply through the central admissions office points system. (This is normally attached to school leaving certificate grades.) One college (Dublin City University) has recently announced that 50 disadvantaged local school leavers per year will, following acceptance through this alternative route, receive additional financial and academic support from the college.

BM I've already mentioned that, at the stage at which I re-entered education, it was important for me that I was able to study within my local community. Other than VTOS, what's happening in terms of community educational provision?

RM A number of colleges have been developing outreach provision. Queens University, Belfast, for example, officially opened its outreach centre in Armagh in February 1997. University College Cork runs a BSocSc degree course in Youth and Community Work which is the first degree programme in Ireland to be targeted specifically at disadvantaged communities; it is offered on an outreach basis. The problem is that in most colleges outreach provision tends to be the domain of a specific department or centre (usually adult and continuing education) rather than being inbuilt to the curricula across departments.

There is of course a whole array of adult education initiatives 'out there', developed by local communities themselves, many of them using progressive and innovative educational approaches; the HE institutions could certainly learn a great deal from community educators and students. Much of this community education is not formally accredited, and so does not 'count' in terms of entry to HE, unless alternative admissions procedures are in place which enable a potential student to present all relevant experience and learning to the college.

Straddling the divide between community education provision and college-based access provision, there are in Ireland three community-based educational access initiatives which received their initial funding from the Irish-American Partnership.

The Limerick Community Based Educational Initiative (LCBEI) was established in 1990. It is based in the parish of Southhill, which is characterised by high unemployment and low formal educational achievement. Its funding now comes from the Department of Education and private sponsors. Financial grants and other support for Southhill students are offered, alongside third-level mentoring and personal development programmes. Student supervisors/role models from within the parish who have gone on to third-level education are involved in a study centre for second-level students. The initiative also incorporates university visits (for potential students and for parents) and information programmes. Although LCBEI has formal links with the University of Limerick, no special access arrangements have been established. In 1984, Southhill had only one undergraduate; by 1994, 21 people from the parish were attending third-level colleges (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1996; LCBEI Newsletter, 1997).

The Ballymun Initiative for Third-Level Education (BITE) was also set up in 1990. Ballymun (in Dublin) faces the same type of socio-economic deprivation as Southhill. BITE is currently funded through private sources, the Department of Education and the local Partnership programme. Partnerships have been established in areas designated as disadvantaged by government. Thirty-five urban and rural areas have been so designated. The function of each partnership is to prepare a local development plan, through a process of local consultation, and to work towards an implementation of the plan. It is focused on Ballymun Comprehensive school and has formal links with Dublin City University which *has* set up special access arrangements for BITE students. BITE has organised open days at third-level institutions, and information nights for parents. It also provides grants and other supports. Students have gained degrees, diplomas and certificates at a range of third-level institutions. Ballymun currently has 54 students in third-level (as compared with two students in 1989 before the Initiative began), 23 graduates, and a number of postgraduates. (Information provided by BITE, December 1996; Lynch and O'Riordan, 1996.)

The Higher Education Liaison Project in Derry (HELP) was set up in 1993. It is associated with the University of Ulster (UU) and the North West Institute of Further and Higher Education, although no special access arrangements in respect of either institution are in place. It targets two working-class girls' schools, one Catholic, one Protestant. St Mary's (Catholic school) serves a community with one of the highest levels of poverty and social disadvantage in the north of Ireland. HELP aims to raise levels of educational aspirations and achievements. Its activities include a student tutoring scheme, homework club (supervised study service), parental involvement in the classroom (with some training provided), a week-long summer school at UU, day visits to UU, a Role Model Week (meetings with 'successful' women in a variety of careers); and a range of extra-curricular activities. The HELP programme is integrated into the schools' curricula. Unlike BITE and LCBEI, HELP does not provide scholarships for individual students. All funding goes to the schools. This lack of targeting of individual students means that the scheme focuses on all students, irrespective of their academic ability. Its approach is 'holistic' – that is it focuses on academic, social and personal development (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1996).

BM These community-based schemes seem to be working. Are there any plans to replicate them elsewhere?

RM There would have to be a relatively significant input of funds – presumably from the Departments of Education, North and South – for this to happen. Although the schemes have undoubtedly enabled a number of individuals who would not otherwise have done so to gain a higher education, it is claimed that they are expensive to run. Another problem that has been identified (in the case of BITE and LCBEI) is that the focus on financial support for academically able individual students means that only a few members of the community – those who are already defined as (potential) achievers in formal education – are helped (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1996). This is not to undermine the very significant achievements of these initiatives, but it is important to be aware of their inevitable limitations.

One way forward might be through the Partnership projects. Dublin's Northside Partnership, for example, has set up an Education Support Scheme which provides financial assistance to enable poorer students to take up third-level places and/or to remain in college. The Partnerships do not, however, have enough money at their disposal to do more than scratch the surface of student need. At the end of the day, the financial need of potential and actual third-level students from economically-disadvantaged communities will have to be met through government provision if any significant difference is to be made on a national level. This would free community access initiatives to concentrate on the dismantling of other obstacles to educational inclusion.

BM It seems that progress is being made, but that there is still a long way to go.

RM That's a fair summary. Access provision in Ireland has been developed on an ad hoc basis, and need does not therefore necessarily give rise to appropriate provision. There are few direct-entry Access programmes, and student numbers in all the programmes combined are relatively small. None of the access initiatives has involved any significant changes within the colleges (to admission or assessment procedures, support and guidance structures, or educational ethos) to accommodate socio-economically disadvantaged students.

Moving forward: some suggestions

BM College personnel should consider going out into the communities, to learn from what is happening there, to find out what working-class people want and need from education, and to offer their expertise to assist local communities in whatever ways those communities might feel is appropriate.

RM Consideration should be given to a radical move away from rigid admissions procedures based on examinations systems which inevitably favour those with greater financial means. While the points system (allocated according to grades) remains in place, however, the Leaving Certificate playing field could perhaps at least begin to be levelled out. A recent suggestion from Malcolm Byrne, the Education Officer of the Union of Students in Ireland (USI), was that students attending schools in disadvantaged areas might receive additional Leaving Certificate points:

> *Could it not be argued that students who have few resources should be entitled to bonus exam points in much the same way as those who take exams through Irish? It is logical to assume that if a student from a less well-off background could avail of the same facilities obtained by a student from a more privileged family that he or she would have better grades' (Irish Times, 1996).*

BM Colleges might acknowledge (rather than ignore) the fact that they are based in a nation in which there has been a situation of war for three decades. An attempt might be made to engage the educational institutions in the debate about the way forward for the people of Ireland.

RM In terms of educational initiatives, working-class community activists interviewed for the Lynch and O'Riordan study identified the following as important: outreach programmes; teacher education about working-class culture; parental involvement; changes to curricula and assessments; pre-college courses and guidance (including study skills development); alternative access routes and school/community/college support personnel. Teachers working in disadvantaged schools added reserved college places for low income students to this list. Students added the need for a reform of the points system (Lynch and O'Riordan, 1996).

BM The concepts of learning and of (useful) knowledge might be given a more critical examination. An attempt might be made to move away from a view of academic learning as a relatively passive (albeit often taxing) activity with little practical application, to a conception of learning as a combination of thought and action.

RM The National Education Convention Report identifies the following as important if more students from working-class backgrounds are to get into (and stay in) third-level education: improvements in grants (particularly for lower income groups); more flexible access routes; an expansion of college-school linkage programmes; improvements in access and first-year 'care' programmes; a need for serious targets for entry of disadvantaged students to third-level institutions, and – linked to this – a need for these institutions to 'identify what the constraints are that prevent such students attending, and remove those within their power to do so'. The report makes it clear, however, that these measures are not enough – they are, in a sense, remedial. It is necessary to develop interventions from pre-primary level onwards (National Education Convention, 1994: 113).

Conclusion

True educational justice and equality is dependent upon greater political and economic equality in society at large, but while we wait for (and work for) societal change, there is much we can do in the specific realm of formal education. As a starting point, anyone with a genuine interest in promoting educational justice, in Ireland and elsewhere, could do worse than to listen to the views of those who currently remain outside the college gates.

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Chapter 8

Student equity: an Australian perspective

Margaret Heagney and Margaret James

Australia's current equity framework is tempered by our political system and our recent history, which are much influenced by our associations with Great Britain and the United States of America. The framework has also developed in response to a unique geography and the long history of Aboriginal people in Australia. This chapter attempts to outline the operation of these influences and to reflect a little on the current situation and the future outlook for equity.

Student equity as we know it in Australia dates from 1990 when the Federal Labour Government released its national equity plan, *A Fair Chance for All: Higher Education that's within Everyone's Reach*. The impetus for the new emphasis on equity in higher education came partly from the Labour Government's economic and social agendas and partly from the anti-discrimination legislation which was enacted during the 1980s. The principle that individuals should not be disadvantaged because of their race, sex, disability or other factors beyond their control was seen to be applicable to higher education. Therefore the government set as the objective for the system 'to ensure that Australians in all groups in society have the opportunity to participate successfully in higher education' (DEET, 1990: 2). This would be achieved by changing the balance of the student population to reflect more closely the diverse composition of Australian society.

The Labour Government's interest in higher education had other motives and was susceptible to other influences. As the Government provided most of the funding for the system, it wished to make the universities more accountable and also more responsive to the economy's needs for a highly skilled workforce. The expansion of student numbers suggested a need to contain the cost of the system to the taxpayer. The result was that equitable access to higher education became a major objective at the same time as a major restructure was undertaken and the user-pays principle was re-introduced.

Restructure of higher education into the Unified National System

Before 1987, the higher education system was characterised by a division between a small number of universities based primarily on the Oxbridge model and a much larger number of miscellaneous institutions or colleges, providing mainly professional, technical or vocational education. Under the 'unified national system, this binary divide was abolished and the smaller institutions were strongly encouraged to merge with the larger ones.

The result has been the establishment of a system of 36 universities, providing mass higher education to a greatly expanded student body. Some of these universities are entirely made up of merging colleges or institutes which are competing for research funding for the first time.

There was a perception that these institutions entered the competitive research arena at the expense of their traditionally strong teaching focus. On the other hand, their students now have the chance to take out a university degree at the end of their studies and proceed to higher degrees if they wish. The traditional universities continue to maintain their prestige through their reputation for research and the high scores required for undergraduate entry. An implicit hierarchy has replaced the binary divide.

Return of user pays – the introduction of the higher education contribution scheme (HECS)

The introduction of the 'higher education contribution scheme' (HECS) in 1988 marked the return of the principle of user-pays which had disappeared 14 years earlier with the abolition of fees. HECS was designed to provide the Government with a means of funding the expanded higher education system. Students were required to make a contribution to the cost of their education through the taxation system. An undergraduate's HECS debt accumulated at the rate of $3,300 per year of full-time study. It is important to realise that HECS is not a full cost recovery exercise but an income-contingent loans scheme. It is this characteristic which masks the fact that HECS is a partial user-pays system and distinguishes it from means-tested living allowances payable to students called Austudy and Abstudy (for Aboriginal students) which are not repayable.

Equity practitioners have found it difficult to assess the impact of HECS on women, people from low socio-economic backgrounds and other disadvantaged groups. However, much anecdotal evidence suggests HECS is a barrier for some groups of students. For example, students from families with no tradition of higher education or borrowing, do not always see the value of taking a loan for higher education. Anecdotal evidence indicates that HECS deters women from some ethnic backgrounds from going to university. One young woman reported that she could not accumulate a HECS debt because no man in her family's ethnic group would marry a woman who had a personal debt. This is compounded by the fact that women's generally lower rates of pay and interrupted work patterns mean they take longer than men to pay off their HECS debts.

A more systematic approach to equity

Paradoxically, while government policy brought the user-pays principle back to higher education, that same policy committed the Government *inter alia* to:

- develop a statement of national equity objectives in higher education
- develop guidelines and suggestions for institutions to take up in their planning
- review the role and effectiveness of government targeted programmes (Dawkins, 1988: 54).

As a result the Federal Government released its national equity plan *A Fair Chance for All* in 1990. It contained objectives, targets and strategies for achieving equity in education and brought substantial changes which included:

- designating the following groups as disadvantaged in the system:
    - i Aboriginal and Torres Strait islander people
    - ii people from Non-English-speaking backgrounds
    - iii people from rural and isolated backgrounds
    - iv people with disabilities
    - v women in non-traditional areas and in higher degrees by research
    - vi people from low socio-economic backgrounds
- moving institutions' equity performance away from project based funding
- greater public accountability (institutions were required to produce equity plans and aboriginal education strategies and include them in their educational profiles, the agreement on which institutions' operating grants are based).

In their equity plans institutions were required to show how they intended to use their resources to implement equity. In addition, the Department of Employment, Education and Training allocated $4 million (later increased to $5 million) to the Higher Education Equity Programme to fund institutions' equity projects.

It is important to note that Australia has always maintained separate programmes (with separate funding) for indigenous and non-indigenous disadvantaged people so that both the unique position of the Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people in Australia and the qualitative and quantitative difference of their disadvantage is recognised. In recent times the Mabo decision, which recognises the right of indigenous people to their traditional lands has provided a new dynamic. So have concerns about indigenous peoples' poor health and diminished education opportunities which have been raised in national and international fora.

A Fair Chance for All paved the way for a more systematic approach to equity for the following reasons :

- institutions' equity plans and processes were open to public scrutiny
- universities had to collect statistics on the designated equity groups
- equity was brought into university planning via the inclusion of equity plans in profiles process, (that is, the funding allocation negotiated between institutions and the government on the basis of an institution's 'profile' which includes its mission, regional characteristics and more recently its equity plan)
- institutions were themselves made responsible for equity.

But *A Fair Chance for All* was not a perfect equity framework. There was no formal definition of the membership of the designated equity groups, no quantitative measures were provided, nor were there any means of evaluating progress towards equity objectives at a national level.

All of these issues were addressed when equity performance indicators were introduced for a three year trial period in 1995. The six equity groups which had been identified in A Fair Chance for All were defined in precise operational terms:

- *people from socio-economically disadvantaged backgrounds*, defined as 'residents in an area with low socio-economic status (SES) as a surrogate for students' low SES'

- *Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people* – this is a self-nominating group
- *women in non-traditional areas of study* in which there are less than 40 per cent female enrolments
- *people from non-English-speaking backgrounds*, 'those students who were born overseas, arrived in Australia less than 10 years ago and who speak a language other than English at home'
- *people with disabilities* who acknowledge those disabilities at enrolment time and request information on services
- *people from rural and isolated areas* – this definition is based on the post code of the students permanent home residence and 'is based on an index of remoteness which combines population density and distance from the nearest provincial city' (Martin 1994:28).

In addition Martin (1994: 12–14) developed four indicators which could be applied to the equity groups:

- *Access:* number of equity groups members in commencing student population as a percentage of total commencing students
- *Participation:* the share which the members of each equity group have of total students enrolments, compared with the incidence of the particular group in the relevant State population
- *Success:* the study load passed by a student as a proportion of the load for which the student enrolled expressed as the ratio of success for the equity group over the success of other students
- *Apparent retention:* the proportion of students enrolled in the institution in a given year, who re-enrol in the institution in the following year less the students who complete their course, expressed as the ratio of apparent retention rate for equity group students over the apparent retention rate of other students.

Equity indicators made it possible for institutions to gauge their success in meeting the targets they set for themselves in response to local factors. They provided the Department of Employment, Education and Training with a way of measuring institutions' equity performance and enabled it to compare performance of the various institutions.

Although the equity indicators use definitions of equity groups adopted as the result of national consultation, some practitioners see the need for the definitions to be complemented by broader descriptions of target groups which recognise their distinctive characteristics. Some ways in which the groups differ are:

- the extent to which individual members can be recognised in the classroom (compare women as a group with socio-economically disadvantaged people)
- the extent to which people are prepared to disclose membership of the group (some people with disabilities may not be prepared to disclose except in a confidential context)
- group identification (strong for Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander people, variable for other groups)
- legislative protection under state and federal anti-discrimination legislation (grounds of sex, race and disability are covered)
- presence in the community of strong lobby groups to influence government and other bodies (for example, specific-purpose groups for Aboriginal education) (James, 1995: 2).

Different equity strategies for different disadvantaged groups

Over the past five years Australian higher education institutions have developed a wide range of equity strategies. This is not surprising given the distinctive characteristics of different disadvantaged groups and the freedom institutions have to develop equity strategies in response to local needs.

For example, at Monash University we have allocated substantial resources for developing support programmes and researching the needs of students with disabilities. In some ways this group is the easiest to work with as students usually self-identify on enrolment forms. In addition they are supported by the disability discrimination legislation. Under this legislation it is unlawful for an educational authority such as a university to refuse a student because of their disability.

Monash University spends approximately close to half a million Australian dollars each year from its operating grant to enable people with disabilities to participate as fully and independently as possible in the university's academic, administrative, cultural, recreational, research and social activities. New strategies are being developed all the time. Current projects include a support programme for students with learning disabilities and a peer support programme for students with psychiatric disabilities. Considerable research is also being carried out to ascertain the needs of students with disabilities. This includes an analysis of the needs of library users with disabilities and a review of academic accommodations in teaching, learning and assessment.

Many strategies for women in non-traditional areas are centred on access and include visits to secondary schools and information dissemination via brochures and pamphlets. However, other strategies focused on success and retention impact more directly on institutions' policy, curriculum development and teaching. To illustrate this point we use the example of Monash University's brochure, *A Fair Go in the Classroom: quality teaching for all*. Using a series of classroom situations drawn from real life, the brochure challenges teachers to examine classroom behaviour to see if they treat all students equally. It reminds teachers they are responsible for all that goes on in the classroom – that is they are responsible for the way they treat their students and for the ways students treat each other. The brochure gives a strong message that sexist behaviour in the classroom is unacceptable and that the university has procedures in place to deal with it.

The Monash Orientation Scheme for Aborigines (MOSA) and the Koorie Studies Centre provide bridging programmes for students from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds to assist them to complete undergraduate studies successfully. Students are offered specific staff, rooms and support mechanisms during the time they are in the bridging programmes or during their undergraduate studies.

Outcomes – how successful has the equity framework been?

A review of the Australian equity framework in 1995 disclosed that access to higher education for Aboriginal students had risen from 1.26 per cent in 1991 to 1.65 per cent in 1995. However, despite the availability of special funding, retention rates of indigenous (Aboriginal) students are very low – nearly six out of every ten quit before the end of their first year.

Access rates of students from non-English-speaking backgrounds rose from five per cent to six per cent in the same period and the access rates of rural and isolated students fell from 19.6 per cent to 18.4 per cent. Women's participation in non-traditional areas other than engineering increased from 40 per cent in 1991 to 42.4 per cent in 1995 and female enrolments in engineering rose from 10.6 per cent to 13.5 per cent in that time.

The report identified that multiple disadvantage, which is membership of more than one equity group, is prevalent among students from low socio-economic backgrounds, students from rural and isolated backgrounds and Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander students. Also students from non-English-speaking backgrounds, who are female and poor, experience multiple disadvantage which is difficult to identify and even more difficult to deal with.

Equity officers also report that institutions are being challenged to provide appropriate levels of funding for support of people with disabilities. Their needs tend to absorb and exceed the small amount of equity funds so far provided by the government, making it difficult for institutions to give proper attention to the other disadvantaged groups which are not protected in the same way by anti-discrimination legislation.

Effects of extending the boundaries

In some cases extending the boundaries to include non-traditional students has impacted as much on institutions' quality as it has on their equity. Although women's low participation rates in Engineering prompted Monash University to produce its brochure, *A Fair Go in the Classroom: quality teaching for all* (mentioned above) as an equity initiative, the brochure helps to establish a learning environment which is not only gender inclusive but is sensitive to diversity; this benefits all students and staff and so becomes an educational quality strategy.

Boundaries have been extended in other ways. For example the MOSA and the Koorie Studies Centre have brought considerable numbers of people from Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander backgrounds to the university. This has developed and broadened Monash's academic activities significantly; indigenous knowledges have found their way into mainstream curricula. At the Centre for Koorie Studies Gippsland campus, undergraduate and postgraduate programmes including Aboriginal history, languages and sociology taught by indigenous people are offered to non-indigenous students during the academic year. Similar programmes are offered at a summer school for international students. In addition, indigenous staff from the MOSA teach elective courses in Medicine and Psychology at the Clayton campus.

What are we facing now?

A national Liberal Coalition Government came to power in 1996. Although Government-funded equity programmes look set to continue as before, there are moves afoot to limit the size of the higher education system, and to make it more market-driven. These moves are manifest in policies such as reducing institutions' funding so they are forced to raise income from students' fees and in lowering the repayment threshold for the HECS.

Professor David Robinson, Vice-Chancellor of Monash University, argues that differential HECS repayment rates are part of the push to limit the size of the system and to expose it further to market forces. It introduces the notion of differentiation which 'sets the scene for a wider appreciation of the fact that different things cost different amounts. This is the first step towards a full-blown voucher system' (Robinson, 1996: 28). He also identifies institutions' freedom to offer funded places above the load they have agreed with the government to enrol, as a major destabilising influence.

Further moves to make the higher education system more market-driven can be seen in increased notions of competition between the various institutions. The Department of Employment, Education, Training and Youth Affairs (the Federal Department of Education) collaborates with private companies to produce publications such as the *Good Universities Guide*. The idea is to give students the chance to shop around and choose the university product which will suit them best. This generates competition between institutions and constructs students as consumers. The guides promote the various universities to the students. They also promote an illusion of choice.

Distance and the illusion of choice are key problems in the marketing of education and this is where Australia's unique geographic context comes into play. Choice is the essence of a market-driven system but it is an illusion for many Australian students. Distances between the cities where universities are located and students' home residences can be enormous. Distance is a tyranny which holds many in its clutches preventing them from exercising their choice and moving to take up courses which may suit them better. Rural women with family responsibilities cannot relocate easily to the city to pursue higher education.

Part-time study is another major factor. Many Australian students are employed during their candidature. In contrast with The Netherlands where less than two per cent of students at Dutch universities study in part-time mode (Hake, 1995: 56), 40 per cent of Australian higher education students are enrolled part time. In addition many full-time students have part-time jobs and this factor makes them reluctant to relocate to other institutions where chances of employment may not be good.

The rural recession also needs to be taken into account. Many parts of rural Australia are experiencing a recession. This makes it difficult for farming community members to send their children to the nearest higher education institution; the chance for some rural students to exercise their choice and take up a place at a distant institution is slight.

Some of the problems associated with charging fees and marketing courses have already been documented. In recent years, Australian higher education institutions have been marketing some of their postgraduate courses and the outcomes in terms of access and equity implications are a concern. Equity indicators applied to the postgraduate fee-paying population show the participation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds and those from rural and isolated areas is very low. Frequently high fees combine with large distances between institutions to prevent some disadvantaged students from participating in fee-courses (Heagney, Ferrier and Tija, 1992:3).

Lessons to be learned

It can be argued that the current Australian student equity model has been both lean and efficient. Although government expenditure on equity has been minimal, substantial equity activity has been generated in the higher education sector. The national framework has been instrumental in producing a high degree of institutional compliance to government equity policy and equity indicators have provided Australian equity practitioners with definitions of disadvantaged groups which are used nationally. Both of these factors have been necessary for the development of cohesive policy.

However, cohesive policy and the national framework have not been sufficient to make the higher education system equitable and accessible to all. Participation of students from low socio-economic backgrounds is abysmally low, and prospects for improving their participation are not bright. High entrance scores, particularly at the traditional universities, give great advantage to those students who have attended well-resourced fee-paying schools.

It is too early to assess the impact of changes to the higher education sector brought about by current government policy. However, preliminary analyses of enrolment patterns suggest mature-age students, particularly women, are casualties of the HECS increased repayment rates. It appears that the gap between the education 'haves' and 'have nots' is widening. Commentators such as Western are beginning to warn Australians that:

> *Class differential in access to higher education is likely to worsen under present government policies . . . other things being equal, this will increase the impact of social origins on socio-economic outcomes like good jobs and earnings and will produce more mobility closure within the class structure. In other words, social origins will matter more for social inequality (Western, 1997: 3).*

While it cannot be denied that such gloomy predictions may well come to pass when more of the higher education system is exposed to market forces, it appears likely that Aboriginal and Torres Strait Islander People's education programmes and funding will survive as there is strong legislative support. Legislation in the form of the Disability Discrimination Act should ensure that programmes and support for students with disabilities survive, but perhaps not at optimum level.

Conclusion

A review of equity practice in Australian higher education institutions over the last ten years would suggest that the development of a national equity framework facilitated the achievement of agreed access and equity goals. However as discussed above, this was not always the case. Despite cohesive policy, equity indicators and agreed definitions of disadvantaged groups, there have been real difficulties in providing equal education opportunities for some groups of students, especially those from low socio-economic backgrounds.

The higher education system looks set to move towards more 'user-pays' while levels of public funding for universities are being reduced and private providers begin to tender for public funds to provide education services. There is a danger that all the responsibility for equity programmes, including most of the provision for high needs students, will fall on the underfunded public sector, while private providers gain a greater share of the profit. If universities are to maintain their commitment to equity and access they will need to develop networks with private donors and industry to provide scholarships for disadvantaged students. The Australian ethos of giving everyone 'a fair go' will provide universities and their equity officers with a significant challenge in the near future.

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Chapter 9

Access strategies under severe circumstances: promoting access in the Chelyabinsk region of the Russian Federation

Maurits van Rooijen

This case study of a joint educational project (JEP) provides a reference point for widened provision in three respects: firstly, its objective is to widen access to higher education for disabled and rural students; secondly, its implementation illustrates the effective management of change in higher education; and thirdly, the process by which this is being achieved is (rather unusually for 'access') through international collaboration.

Only those with an excellent knowledge of geography will not hesitate when locating Chelyabinsk on the map. It is in Russia, obviously, but despite the end of Soviet days, the Russian Federation still covers a large area. When going eastward, reaching Moscow means that you are only halfway. In spatial terms, the distance Chelyabinsk – Moscow equals Moscow – London, but in travel time terms Moscow is much nearer to London than to Chelyabinsk. However, when it comes to the political terms, and the related social and economic conditions, there hardly seems to be any distance between the Russian capital and this region situated at the far end of Europe, on the border with Asia.

The reason I had to get familiar with the socio-economic context of higher education in Chelyabinsk rather suddenly was because the European Access Network (EAN), the University of Westminster, together with the University of North-London and the French University of Science and Technology in Lille (Lille I), became involved in a European funding scheme, a TEMPUS/TACIS funded project. This project's aim is to establish Chelyabinsk State University (CSU) as a regional and national innovator in the enhancement of access opportunities to higher education for people with disabilities and for people living in rural areas. It has a total budget of approximately 0.5 million roubles and runs from January 1996 to September 1998.

The chapter presented here is based on the experiences gained two years into the project. It offers the right moment to raise some questions about the way forward. But first, I will briefly illustrate those socio-economic conditions which are relevant to our effort to create wider access to higher education in this region, and which are described in the title of this chapter as 'severe circumstances'.

Conditions

Creating better opportunities for people with disabilities and the rural population to attend higher education is an aim familiar to many and to which most people in the

United Kingdom, France and elsewhere in the world will subscribe, at least in principle. However, when it comes to the Chelyabinsk region, this aim is more than 'just' a positive feature of educational policies. The scale as well as the urgency becomes clear by looking at some very basic statistics. In 1992 this region had 5,227 disabled children. Three years later the number had increased to 13,341: an increase of 250 per cent! It is estimated that only one-fifth of the children are actually healthy and over 40 per cent are chronically ill (Batukhin, 1996; Council of Europe, 1996; Feutre, 1996). Unfortunately, it is unlikely that these trends will change for the better. It is urgent for the higher education sector to prepare for these circumstances and to create opportunities to enable this new, unfortunate generation to take full advantage of education. Given the size of the group, it is no longer a question of what is 'good', it has become an issue relevant for the future of the region. No society can afford to discard large groups of its next generation, without later having to pay a high price.

The number of children with mental and communication problems is likely to increase further in the years to come. One likely cause is the ecological situation which is very bad indeed. Another cause is, without doubt, the economic circumstances. Chelyabinsk is not a rich region. Furthermore, the limited wealth which is available is far from equally divided. The sharp stratification of wealth in modern Russia means that many families live in difficult, sometimes extremely difficult, financial situations. This obviously affects their health and has been a major factor in the dramatic increase in numbers of profoundly unhealthy and disabled children.

The economic situation also affects the opportunity for the rural population to study. Chelyabinsk is a large region (87,900 sq km, so slightly larger than Scotland or more or less two-thirds of England), but it only has 3.6 million inhabitants. This means approximately 40 inhabitants per square kilometre, compared to nearly 65 in Scotland and some 430 in England. In such a situation, the university is rarely 'nearby'. A student will have to move and live in residence. In Russia this means moving away from home for five years, since the university curriculum is much longer than in the UK. But there are no generous state grants available to support the student, nor is there any support for his or her family, which lives mostly in poor, rural conditions. The family will therefore suffer both practical and financial hardships by the student's absence. Even correspondence education often proves to be too expensive in such circumstances.

Creating access opportunities for disabled persons and for the rural population is therefore a major task of the utmost importance. But still the picture is incomplete. In comparison to the financial situation of CSU, the average British university is comfortable, even well-off. To put it in the simplest terms: the state only covers teachers' salaries, and those at a very modest level. In order to survive, Russian universities tend to look for fee-paying students. But this is, of course, a highly negative development from an 'access' point of view.

The project

The circumstances in Chelyabinsk might be severe but are not necessarily extraordinary in present-day Russia. So why run a project here and not elsewhere? If European Union money for a project were to be offered to any other Russian university, none would be likely to refuse, and probably, a British university would not do so either. One of the main reasons why the CSU is the right partner for such a project, is its proven commitment to access and the role it is willing to fulfil as a centre for access in the entire region.

Very important also is the support at government level. The Russian Vice-Prime Minister authorised the Chelyabinsk region to create, with the support of several ministries, a regional centre for disabled students at CSU. Without such clear support of all parties involved, the project would be unlikely to succeed, given the size of the task.

The other partners of the project, both the British and the French, have a track record of dealing with access issues for many years. They are willing to share their experiences and do so without gain. In fact, the project requires a considerable amount of both direct and hidden 'subsidies' from all the partner institutions.

The anticipated results of the TACIS-funded project are to initiate new admission policies, to create new services such as a careers service for students, to improve existing student services, especially for disabled students, and to experiment with open and distance teaching in the region. These objectives were defined in mutual agreement during the so-called pre-JEP stage of the project, when a delegation from the University of Lille visited Chelyabinsk for one week. The results of this visit formed the basis for the successful bid written by Maggie Woodrow (1995), director of the European Access Network (EAN).

The project is, in its simplest description, about sharing experiences with access, and furthermore it offers a substantial amount of money to buy equipment for the Russian partner institution. But most importantly: it is *not* about Western institutions coming to Russia to solve problems. The project only helps, supports, and enables the Russian participants to deal themselves with the enormous tasks. In all honesty, the Western partners would not be able to deal with the issues directly. They quite simply have insufficient knowledge about the local situation, its limitations, precise needs and possibilities. Only our colleagues from Chelyabinsk can make this project a success.

Experiences so far

During 1996, the emphasis was on obtaining information about the practical aspects of student services, including access management and organisation of career services in the UK and in France and to set up similar types of services and systems at CSU. In the second year the emphasis has changed direction to encompass Distance Education, both the technical and educational aspects.

The most prominent activities of the project have been the mobility of staff. A considerable number of staff from CSU went to London and Lille for, initially, orientation visits, later training courses related to the issues described above. In the period March to July 1996, 26 persons from Russia visited London and/or Lille as participants in this programme.

One of the things which, in my opinion, makes this project outstanding, is the clear strategy behind the mobility as it takes place. One might think that the visits to London and Lille are only about 'collecting knowledge', but I now understand that the Rector of CSU is a very able manager who appreciates that more is at stake. Obtaining expertise or ideas is only part of what needs to be achieved. The Rector, Dr Valentin Batukhtin, understands that he also needs to create a widespread commitment within his own institution to support the project. In trendy jargon, he is aware of the need for change management. Like in any other large, complex institution, there is a risk that staff will be critical if not sceptical towards the new ideas. A way to overcome this is to select carefully key members of staff at different levels of the organisation to participate, to convince themselves of the value of the project, and to transfer their enthusiasm for the project to colleagues. In other words, collecting the knowledge and stimulating ideas is not necessarily the most difficult part. More challenging is the implementation, and this requires skilful management. During the first twelve months delegations were led by vice-rectors or deans, but since then a number of staff at implementation levels of CSU have visited France and the UK and are being increasingly involved.

In line with this, the emphasis in the project is on the so-called East-West mobility. In fact, compared with the original proposal, the anticipated mobility has already been modified, by creating more East-West and even less West-East mobility. There is no need for western staff to go to Chelyabinsk to introduce western solutions. Though we share our experiences, both the positive and the negative ones, the resulting projects are completely locally created and therefore should be more suitable for the local circumstances and needs. However, some French staff did visit Chelyabinsk, mainly to offer technical advice for the installation of equipment. Their observations were unanimous: that we should not underestimate the level of knowledge already available in Chelyabinsk, including when it comes to the technological facets of distance learning.

One might say that the visits to Chelyabinsk certainly have a value when it comes to falsifying western presumptions and therefore are essential to the quality of the project though the number of visits can remain limited. One delegation from the West included two members with 'hands-on' experience, for example about the pedagogic aspects of developing open distance learning materials, and a member with a wealth of relevant experience at senior managerial level who was able to supply a more overall assessment of progress and the task still awaiting us. One of the most difficult issues was the purchase of equipment to support distance teaching.

Probably I am unfair, but I did sometimes get the impression that our Russian partner institution expected too much from the technical equipment available for distance teaching. The fact that distance teaching has become a main focus in the project is of course quite acceptable. But the problem with modern technology can be its 'fatal attraction'. The temptation to want the latest equipment is difficult to resist. Yet often it is much better to buy what already has proven its value. After some discussion common sense prevailed and a quite conservative purchase was made, since it was recognised that very modern equipment would require a very sophisticated technical infrastructure. Chelyabinsk simply does not possess such infrastructure. It is, however, very encouraging that the Telephone Company (Sviazinform) recognises the importance of the distance teaching experiment and is willing to give the highest priority to the upgrading of certain lines and systems. In addition to the Tempus programme, the Sviazinform will pay for four CSU students to study at Lille university for one year (Feutrie, 1996). After all, if this experiment works, it can be an example for other projects.

After the first two years, we could also ask ourselves the quite selfish question: what did the western partners get out of it? The questions of our Russian visitors frequently make us wonder why we are doing things the way we do them, and if our familiar way is really the best possible way. The questions stimulate open-mindedness, creativity, and sometimes the project renews enthusiasm for the basics of access issues. Asking the right question is often more important than giving the right answer. And our Russian colleagues do manage frequently to ask the right questions. For them, nothing about the way we deal with access is self-evident. And that is of great value to us indeed.

Management of wider access

The project described here had the simple title of 'management of wider access'. From the outset a number of dimensions were foreseen, though the real depth of the complex issues surrounding the implementation is becoming clear only now, while the project is being implemented. This is far from surprising. It seems inevitable that one is struck by the magnitude of the task only when the real work has started. Hopefully my description has illustrated that the complex issues which have emerged have been approached with that essential mixture of faith, trust, foolhardiness, pragmatism and flexibility.

Besides the day-to-day troubleshooting, most of the complexity of the project had been identified at the very start of the project. According to the original proposal:

> *'It is envisaged that the project will have an impact at various levels (departmental, faculty, institutional), in both the short and longer term, within Chelyabinsk State University, and that the good practice in university management and administration established at CSU will provide a model, aspects of which can be adopted by other regional and national institutions' (Woodrow, 1995).*

In addition, the project set itself a task of creating new centres and services for disabled students and students from rural areas. It was also expected that the project would make CSU more 'outward looking', or, maybe one should say, *even* more outward looking. And clearly, the same applied to the other partners in the project. In the execution of the work, the senior management of CSU understood that these aims were not just a matter of setting up the appropriate structures, creating the needed technological support, defining policies, incorporating the aims and objectives in the institutional development plan, but most important of all: that the human resources policy needed to be in line with the strategic objectives. This after all is the key to change management: reaching individual key members of staff at all levels in the institution. And in this respect the international dimension has proven to be particularly invaluable. The project, with its aims and objectives for access, has become tangible through the delegation visits to Lille and London. I am convinced that without the international dimension the change management to achieve access would have been a much slower and certainly a much more difficult task.

We may not fully have appreciated that the project described here is breaking new ground. It is far from obvious that higher educational institutions in central and eastern Europe declare a commitment to access policies. The needs of disabled students rarely seem to feature high on the strategic agenda of HE institutions in the more eastern regions of Europe. Universities and other higher educational institutions normally tend to cater mainly for an urban population or for those willing and able to come to urban areas. Educational policies aiming explicitly at rural populations or at disabled students are exceptional. The fact that the project at CSU already has been recognised as being of regional, even national importance, is of great significance. And the fact that it is linked to the work of an international organisation (European Access Network) offers the opportunity to present results for an international forum.

The aim to develop the project located at CSU as a model to other institutions pushes the JEP to a higher level than the establishment of access in one particular place. It also increases the pressure on the project. The result should not only be acceptable, it should also be exemplary. The access policy at CSU will need to be successful, otherwise it cannot be exemplary. But seen from an international perspective, when is an access policy successful? What are the precise performance indicators? Is it purely about statistics? Or is it also possible to speak in terms of quality? It is an elementary discussion which had to be addressed at the outset of the project by all institutions involved, and which also revealed occasionally a discrepancy between French, continental European views and the British ideas. The international, rather than purely British 'definition' of access and successful access, is also addressed in the Council of Europe report *Quality-Equality, Projects on Access to Higher Education in Europe: Working Report* (1996). The working definition of 'access' presented in this report was adopted in the JEP:

- greater participation in higher education of good quality
- the extension of participation to include currently under-represented groups
- a recognition that participation extends beyond entry to successful completion.

The JEP targets two under-represented groups, not at random, but because of the circumstances in Chelyabinsk. It does not just aim at a higher number of admissions for these groups, but also deals with the quality of provision. The project accepts that 'access' is not just about entry into university of under-represented groups, but that a more focused approach can achieve greater results and that the emphasis should be on the total experience of study. Success of the JEP depends at least as much on quality as on quantity.

Follow-up

The project has now entered its third and final year. There is very little time to achieve what we need to achieve. Many elements still need to be addressed. One is, for example, the academic aspects of creating open distance teaching materials. It has been decided to start with a new centre at Miass in Chelyabinsk and with courses in business and economics. Establishing this centre will have not only a practical but also a great symbolic/political importance.

But maybe the most important and most difficult question is: what will happen once the TACIS funding ends? Many excellent projects reached a dead end when the external funding stopped. It is therefore crucial to identify well in advance how the good work can continue after the project runs out of funds. In other words, the key issue we need to address as early as possible is the sustainability of the project and its objectives. Of course, the EU funds are intended for pump-priming and I am sure that the Russian commitment will not let the achievement go to waste. But at the same time, now that we have established a good working partnership, so much more could be done on a very cost effective basis. At the same time, the experiences gained in Chelyabinsk are likely to be relevant for other regions in the world. The new challenge, therefore is, how to keep the momentum going in Chelyabinsk and, at the same time, set similar projects in motion elsewhere.

Possibly the most challenging aspect of the JEP described here will be its future funding implications. The severe circumstances mentioned in the title of this contribution are certainly financial, much more so than at any institution in western Europe. Yet the success of access quite simply cannot depend forever on pump-priming projects. In less severe circumstances, one might be able to consider access as a non-commercial activity, maybe even as an alternative to overtly commercial managerial thinking and operating. But the reality of Chelyabinsk might very well be that some kind of marriage between access policy and commercial action will have to be arranged. After all, as mentioned before, the (limited) wealth in Chelyabinsk is unequally divided, which means that some can afford to pay for good quality eduction and a 'Robin Hood' strategy might be possible. However, it is hoped that this funding issue will not be considered just a matter of local concern. It is also our wish that the access project will retain its international dimension, since it is the international outlook which has contributed an added value dimension to the project.

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Section 4

Researching equity issues

Chapter 10

The role of social theory in action research: working for change in a university adult education department in a multi-cultural city

Jane Clarke

One aim of this chapter is to show how social theory can usefully be employed in action research in order to understand the problem more fully at the outset and to act as an ongoing guide to the research. The second and connected aim is to critically evaluate research and development work in a particular project by assessing the extent to which it goes beyond the boundaries of the traditional university adult education constituency and is empowering to the target group. The target group in this case is adults from minority ethnic communities living in Leicester and Leicestershire and the remit is to work towards fulfilling their part-time higher educational needs.

I will begin by outlining the research problem and the original strategy for addressing it as set out in the funding bid. This will be followed by a brief explanation of the theoretical approach adopted including the use of a research map (Layder, 1993) as an aid to unravelling the salient issues and processes. Then the project will be discussed in breadth and in depth through firstly giving an overview of the work so far and demonstrating how a realist approach (Clarke and Layder, 1994) and the theory of social domains (Layder, 1997) have informed it. Secondly a more detailed case study looking at the staff development of black tutors will give an in-depth analysis of an initiative that was not part of the original bid, but through the use of the research map emerged as a key issue. It also addresses the concept of empowerment and the tension between the latter and broader social constraints. Finally an evaluation will be made of the usefulness of the theoretical approach and of the work of the project to date.

The research problem can be described as both sociological and social. It is of academic interest why, in a city that is made up of nearly one third of people from minority ethnic communities, the student and staff make up of the Department of Adult Education is less than five per cent from minority ethnic communities. It is also, more importantly, a practical and moral issue. The mission statement of the University states it is there to serve the local community. The Department of Adult Education has had a loyal following of appreciative students but they are drawn on the whole from only a part of that community. Why does this matter? Because sections of the population are not making use of a conducive learning environment; because from many years of teaching adults in further, adult and higher education I know that heterogeneity of experience in a student group enhances learning for all; because the Department would become ossified if it did not go out into the community, listen to, and respond to present needs; because of the justice of a philosophy of lifelong learning for all that is inclusive rather than exclusive.

For some of these reasons a bid was made to the Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) for funds from their widening provision initiative. Work started in January 1996 and funding runs until August 1999. The original bid was to network with relevant organisations and institutions in Leicester and Leicestershire and to discover the part-time higher educational needs of adults from minority ethnic communities through focus groups and in-depth interviews. The mainstream programme of the Department of Adult Education would then be developed to fulfil those needs where possible. Whilst the bid seeks to increase the ethnic diversity of the student population it does not explicitly address issues of educational equality in that there is no explicit reference to accreditation of prior learning (APEL) or to the development of a formalised student support system. Moreover the bid focused on higher educational needs which precluded tapping into those people who had had little formal education.

The original bid acknowledged the importance of gathering qualitative data from members of the different minority ethnic communities. It also acknowledged the diversity of Leicester's minority ethnic population not only in terms of area of origin, religion and language, but also in terms of educational experience. It does not, however, take account of the layered nature of social reality (Layder, 1997) nor of hidden processes at work which may become manifested in the actions of individuals or groups. On the other hand a realist epistemology, or way of knowing, (Clarke and Layder, 1994) works from the understanding that there are hidden processes that affect observable actions and structures. For example, ideologies of racism and the power resources on which they are based are not easily observed but manifestations of them can be seen in many locales including recent immigration and nationality legislation; the national curriculum; particularly in History and English, and the day-to-day experiences of racial harassment that black people experience in Britain.

There are two other aspects of realism that underpin the methodology of this project. Firstly realism concentrates on the nature of society as a whole rather than the smaller elements that make it up. All dimensions of society (both larger and smaller, immediate and more remote) are relevant in the explanation of particular aspects of social life. Low take-up of university adult education by particular groups is a result of many factors, not just those immediately connected with the situation. For example, regulations about overseas qualifications, and nineteenth century assumptions about the superior intellect of white people (Miles, 1982), may affect the level of motivation to study of adults from minority ethnic communities as well as the educational institution's degree of responsiveness. Secondly realism stresses the importance of combining the analysis of human activity as it occurs in face to face encounters with an interest in broader social structures such as economic political and educational organisations. The assumption is that people's behaviour is always influenced by the wider institutional context of society. For example, the low expectations teachers have of African-Caribbean boys (Wright, 1993) which they impart in their interactions with the pupils and with each other is the result of many socio-economic and attitudinal factors.

However, it is important to remember that the influence is not all one-way. People contribute to the maintenance of the institutional environment through resisting change, but they are also capable of initiating change. If they were not, there would be little point in our attempting to extend the boundaries of higher education and encouraging others to change their social and perhaps in the long-term their economic circumstances by taking part in education initiatives.

The four levels, or research elements, are explained in Layder (1993). Layder's central concern is to explain how face-to-face encounters emerge out of the combined effects of social and psychological factors. The research map is useful when trying to understand a particular social or research problem because it can help clarify the relationships between different historical processes, and of the way that power is articulated at different levels. With any one research problem certain levels will have more significance than others, but each impinge on the other, and are closely related in different ways. The four levels are 'context', which include the values, traditions and forms of social and economic organisation; 'setting', which includes work and non-work organisations, so in this case comprises the University and the Department; 'situated activity', which is social interaction that in this case takes place in the classroom, and other locations and finally 'self', which is the participating individual's self identity as it has developed from his/her unique personal history.

There is insufficient space here to describe in detail the context of the project in Leicester. However, outside the London area, it is the local authority with the highest percentage of all minority ethnic groups (Leicester City Council, 1996). The communities are heterogeneous. There is a diversity of religion, of area of origin, of time of migration, of language and culture, and of educational experience. It has recently been argued that African-Caribbeans in Leicestershire experience particular disadvantages (Benyon *et al*, 1996; Lyle *et al*, 1996), such as a disproportionately high level of school exclusions.

Other part-time higher education provision for adults in Leicester and Leicestershire includes a plethora of access courses run by sixth form colleges, FE colleges, community centres and community projects. These courses are at a similar level to certificate courses run by the Department. These courses are often free to those on benefit, and are less costly than courses run by the Department. Part-time degree programmes are offered in a range of subjects at both Universities, including evening programmes at the local new University. There is a higher proportion of students from ethnic minorities at that University but on one part-time evening degree there is some concern about lower retention rates of students from minority ethnic communities.

At the level of 'setting', like many other departments of continuing and adult education, the one at Leicester has experienced contraction in recent years. On the other hand the need to work out a strategy for survival and success in the present financial situation hitting universities is positive for the project because there is a clear commitment to widening provision. The Department has its main teaching base close to Leicester city centre – Vaughan College where there is no IT provision for students and access for disabled people is limited. The curriculum offered is broad but not necessarily balanced. For example, there is a disproportionate number of students taking counselling courses. There is a large certificate/diploma programme from which students can progress to a BA Humanities or a BSc Human and Environmental Sciences if they wish.

Past initiatives aimed at widening provision to adults from minority ethnic communities include a Certificate in Urban Studies run with a local youth and community centre. It is now run by the centre and the other local University. A mental health initiative 'Ethnicity, Mental Health and Social Policy' was a joint project between the Department and the Leicester Black Mental Health Group (Westwood, 1989). However, there has been no embedding of provision. Out of 1,031 enrolments this academic year 40 stated on the Higher Education Statistics Agency (HESA) forms that they were from one of the minority ethnic groups.

'Situated activity' includes all the different types of interaction that take place in the Department. In the classroom there is communication between tutors and students, and students and students. There are tutorials and interviews. At reception there is telephone and face-to-face interaction with students and prospective students, and in the cafeteria there is interaction between students, students and tutors, and between tutors as well as both groups communicating with catering staff. Between staff there is interaction at staff meetings, exam boards and in informal meetings with colleagues. The meanings these interactions impart collectively contribute to the ethos of the Department. Whilst it is essentially very friendly, participant observation in the past year has given me an awareness of the need for sensitive staff training in the areas of reception, curriculum, student support, and catering, so that the needs of a more diverse student groups can be responded to.

Lastly 'self' gives an insight into the psychobiographies and life careers of students, prospective students, adult education and university personnel at all levels, teaching and non teaching. In-depth interviews and focus groups have covered the educational, training and work experiences of participants and other biographical aspects where participants have seen them as relevant, as well as discussing future needs. Similarly, conversations with staff have given an insight into their own histories, their perceptions of change and have enabled me, for example, to broach the subject of reception training in a sensitive way.

Because of the history of the University's and other agencies' relationships with the community it was clear from a very early stage that research and development needed to go hand in hand rather than following the pattern of the original bid. There was a certain jadedness about yet another research project when I spoke to key informants such as heads of community centres, and I felt I needed to give something back in return for having access to focus groups. This has ranged from doing an input on research methodology for an access group, to putting an African-Caribbean group in touch with magazine *Empower* and giving them back copies and giving information about black history degrees.

For both theoretical and practical reasons therefore a multi-strategy approach is being used which takes account of social processes such as ethnocentrism, discrimination and disadvantage operating on a number of levels and consequently with different histories. For example, there is the broader historical context of colonialism, slavery, and immigration legislation, and education policy; there is the particular history of migration to and race relations in Leicester; there is the history of the Department of Adult Education, the curriculum offered and its traditional student population; there are the histories of interactions in the Department and in the University, in the classroom, in meetings, in the cafeteria, library and at reception; finally there are the psychobiographies of individual actors – staff and students who are affected by and affect the other three levels.

The more formal aspects of the research include interviewing and focus groups, but as a member of the Department who is also involved in some teaching I have been a participant observer for the past year. Observations have been tested out against the contributions of people I have interviewed and members of focus groups. It was essential to involve staff in the Department from an early stage. I explained what I was doing at a staff meeting six weeks into my contract and saw key members of staff individually early on. It was also important to embed myself and the project in the University so I volunteered to become a member of the university equal opportunities committee.

There are two aspects to the primary research. Focus groups have taken place in different locations with groups who have a diversity of educational and other experience. Here the aim is to discover their educational histories, their perceptions of higher education and their needs. The in-depth interviews have been with current students or ex-students on certificate and degree programmes in the Department and with current and ex-part-time students at a new university in the Midlands to discover what facilitates student retention and successful completion.

It is crucial to involve colleagues in institutional development because I am on a two-year contract, and the project only runs until 1999. Meetings with key personnel have enhanced links with sixth form and further education colleges, community centres and voluntary projects. There are a number of initiatives that are at an early stage of development. One is a Certificate in Advice Work which is being worked on in conjunction with the Faculty of Law and a local youth and community centre which will be delivered at the centre. Another is a one-year counselling course to be taught at a women's community project. The course will specifically address cultural issues and racism and will enable students to move onto the second year of the Certificate in Counselling Studies programme at Vaughan College. External funding is being sought for both these initiatives. Within the Department there is the development of an 'African and Asian identities' strand to the BA Humanities which was first offered in September 1997.

From an examination of the breadth of the project I will now turn to look at one initiative in detail. A black tutors' advisory group was convened to involve African, African Caribbean and Asian tutors in the project, and in the Department, with the long term aim of their developing courses which would be appropriate to a more diverse range of the population of Leicester. The rationale is to use the traditional way of putting on courses in adult education but to involve a new group of tutors, and to allow the few tutors from minority ethnic groups working in the Department to increase their role.

At the level of 'context' Leicester has a large pool of well-qualified people from minority ethnic communities. Many are in jobs that they are overqualified for, or are in part time work because of the disadvantages they experience in the labour market. At the level of 'setting' it is clear that the Department needs to employ more staff from these communities in order to broaden the welcoming ethos and to provide role models for students. Additionally the workers on the project are both white and given the heterogeneity of Leicester's population a diversity of interests needs to be represented. Moreover, my own experience of work in Leicester meant that I had many colleagues and friends that I had worked with over the years who were interested in the project and what I was doing.

However, as a new member of staff in the Department I needed to test out the idea with colleagues. The first meeting was held in March and was for those who had already been involved in the Department either as tutors or students. The aim of the meeting was to listen to their experiences and their reflections on the project and to float the idea of a Saturday school and the opportunity to tutor. I then interviewed ex-colleagues who had experience of teaching adults, and a number of youth and community tutors and invited them to become members of the group. There were further meetings in June and October 1996 to reflect on the project and to develop the idea of the Saturday school further. Five people wanted to tutor, only one of whom already did part-time work in the Department. However, there were clear ideas about the kinds of courses that needed to be offered so three further contacts with relevant expertise were invited to take part. The group and individual tutors had made decisions about an appropriate curriculum for the day.

In November a preparation day for the Saturday school was held. Its aim was to develop a group identity for the day so that all tutors could listen to and make suggestions about each others' proposals, what and how they were teaching on the half day taster courses. The atmosphere was supportive and a new name for the day was brainstormed – *Diverse Britain: let's meet, let's talk*. Six of the courses are designed for as broad a constituency as possible. One is specifically aimed at Asian parents. Lunch was provided and participants were given expenses and a small fee for attending.

The day was also a useful learning exercise for the project workers. It provided hard evidence of the need to do staff development work with catering staff even though the dietary needs of the groups had been discussed beforehand. Reception staff need help with different naming systems and it was clear that the art exhibition on show would not have been appropriate for a day which hoped to attract a significant proportion of students from minority ethnic communities. As a result a collection of photographs taken by a Jamaican photographer of African-Caribbeans in Derby was hired in May.

In January 1997 meetings with individual tutors were held to finalise their planning, to discuss their needs on the day, and to listen to their suggestions for publicity and marketing. The publicity and marketing was carefully organised and included the use of a database that has been developed, the press and local radio. One of the tutors at the Saturday school works for the BBC Asian Network in Leicester and he agreed to give us air time. *Diverse Britain: let's meet, let's talk* took place on 10 May 1997. The courses on offer included Welfare Rights, Hinduism and the Media, Parenting Teenage Children and Migrations to Leicester. It is intended that in the next academic year tutors who wish to will offer term long courses in their subject which in turn can be integrated into the certificate programme at a later date. Tutors have been empowered to decide what and how they should teach, but were constrained in location for the day. We have agreed to be more flexible about where we offer longer courses for those tutors who feel that a community location is more appropriate.

In conclusion it is my own academic history that had led me to use this approach. When I was doing a postgraduate course in research methods at Leicester a group of us used the research map to address other research problems such as truancy. The map gave us a more rounded view of the problem. We were able to look at it through different lenses from microscope to telescope, to look at the close detail and to look at what is there on the horizon and so perceive the waves out there that will break on the shore, as well as the detailed patterns in the sand. It enables one to question a multiplicity of social processes in a systematic way. Thus the research map can be used as a framework for opening up any research question. In this case it has clarified how racism can be experienced in different ways. It enables a movement between being involved and stepping back from the area of consideration.

It could be argued that as a white researcher I have got the answers that I might have wanted to hear from black respondents. Any interviewer doing qualitative work will not get responses that would be replicated totally, but from initial analysis, and from the feelings that I got when conducting interviews and focus groups, I do not consider that my colour was too much of an obstacle to honest response. Good practice in research credits the contribution of focus group members and interview subjects and rewards them where possible in different ways, for example through information giving and through responding to development needs when these are articulated where possible. I realise that this is not a truly 'bottom-up' approach (see Mirza and Jowitt in this book), but it is in a variety of ways responding to some of the diverse needs of adults from minority ethnic communities. The type of development work being done may be specific to the situation in Leicester but I would argue that in order to fulfil needs and bring about change it is almost as important to take account of the culture of the providing educational institution as it is to listen to the voices of excluded groups when they are expressing their educational aspirations.

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Chapter 11

Youth views: A University of Bradford community action research project conducted with and for young people from minority ethnic communities in Bradford

Nadira Mirza and Tony Jowitt

This chapter describes the development of an on-going ethnic minorities project in Bradford, northern England. The first section sets the political scene in Bradford. The second section describes how the Youth Views (YV) project has developed from a more broad-based ethnic minorities initiative. It describes how YV developed and why we have used our particular approach. The third section raises issues that need to be addressed as the project evolves and draws tentative conclusions and suggestions for the future.

The background

Bradford has the fastest-growing youth population in Britain; it is predicted that by the year 2000, 50 per cent of all school leavers will be from Asian parentage. It also has a history of young people of Caribbean, African and Asian heritage taking to the streets as a form of protest against the local activities of Fascist organisations and discriminatory forms of policing. This is evident through the youth led disturbances of 1974, when a police car was overturned on Manningham's Lumb Lane after a perceived wrongful arrest of an Asian youth; in 1981 when 12 members of the Asian Youth Movement were arrested for making petrol bombs in an attempt to defend themselves from the National Front; in 1987 when young people cordoned parts of the West Bowling area of the inner city as a protest against police activity and more recently the Manningham disorders or 'riots' which took place over three nights in June 1995.

Over the years this has resulted in allocations of national government funding as well as much national media interest and local funds being allocated to this particular inner city area of 'stress'. There has also been the development of hand picked youth forums and panels funded by European Social Fund (ESF) grants and the identification of leaders or spokes people among young Asian men. These disturbances have been attributed to young people's exclusion from the political and economic decision making processes in the city and their frustration at this (Foundation 2000 Report, 1995).

None of these incidents warranted a Home Office inquiry. However, the effect of the last disorders was to shock both the city 'fathers' and conventional community leaders, leading to a series of community hearings which were conducted by a commission of inquiry appointed by the Bradford congress. A voluntary association of important Bradford institutions, they had a remit to collect evidence about the disorders by listening to individuals in the communities who chose to give an account of their experiences and views concerning life in Manningham. The commission invited people to give evidence to it through leaflets and in the end listened to 76 members of the public, 189 people who attended small group meetings and 119 official and public representatives.

The report of the hearings, conducted by the commission of inquiry, *The Bradford Commission Report* (1996) took 18 months to be published and was not endorsed by the one Asian member of the group of three commissioners. He subsequently published his own report (Taj, 1996). It seems that communities and agencies alike were unimpressed with the result which is perceived to be an over-long account of previously overstated Asian family practices such as arranged marriages, stereotypical information concerning issues such as domestic violence, well-known information regarding police practices, low levels of educational attainment, the need for 'real' jobs and the poor quality of public services. Minority ethnic communities and their voluntary organisations felt the report did not make strong recommendations, but concentrated on stigmatising their cultural life styles which were seen as underlying the disturbances in Manningham and the effects of the poverty they experience. Minority ethnic youth groups and other organisations indicated to the authors of this chapter that the bulk of witnesses were either officials or people who were engaged in a statutory or voluntary capacity with minority ethnic communities. Those who might be termed 'rioters', as the report calls them, did not give evidence.

It was clearly apparent from the contents and tone of the report that very few young people, especially women, gave evidence. Young people were not being listened to, older people's perceptions and experiences of loss of 'control' over youth was an issue and the overall feelings of voyeurism further alienated young people. Young people in Bradford had this to say for example:

> *They say they will listen to us but when we talk they tell us to shut up. . . They give us their opinion, but don't listen to ours.*

Women and girls were angered by official community views such as:

> *Keep your hens (daughters) and let your cockerels (sons) roam free.*

It is against this background that YV was set up.

The ethnic minority project and development of YV

The ethnic minority project

The Higher Education Funding Council for England (HEFCE) funded widening provision ethnic minority project was initiated in January 1996. It has the aim of:

- developing provision to cater for minority ethnic group students
- increasing the number of minority ethnic group students participating in all aspects of the University

- developing initiatives which encourage participation and impact on educational under-achievement.

The Centre for Continuing Education at the University of Bradford is aware that there is a lack of information and recognition of young people's real educational, economic and social experiences by the statutory providers which means that educational services are often not appropriate and are currently being delivered based on assumed needs.

To redress this problem the project undertook a needs analyses with 40-plus ethnic minority voluntary organisations, to identify the exact nature of educational provision as articulated by their members. The needs analysis was completed by the majority of existing minority ethnic community organisations.

The ethnic minority project has since 1996 raised funds and developed a range of initiatives based on the findings of the needs analysis survey. It has adopted non-traditional methods in staff and student recruitment, design and delivery. These initiatives, which include: welfare rights and counselling courses; a Saturday junior university; a series of community based health courses and a young Asian peoples HIV/AIDS course have all involved university staff working across departmental boundaries and with community workers in contributing their expertise, skills and time during and outside their normal working hours.

However, the analysis did not give us enough information about the educational aspirations or the type of services young people want from the University. What we did learn was that the needs of these communities of young women and men are different from those of their parents' generation and their white peers and that since young people talk to each other who better to find out about their needs but themselves. At the same time such a strategy would short circuit existing community leaders and activists, whose role is increasingly being questioned by south Asian youth.

Development of YV

The YV project, was based on the principles of community development and youth empowerment and was a partnership between youth organisations and the University with the aim of recruiting 10 young people aged 16–25, for whom the University customised a research skills programme using the expertise of research staff, youth workers in the community and the staff from the Centre for Continuing Education. These young researchers would then use the skills they had learned to draw up and implement an issue-based questionnaire in order to conduct face-to-face interviews and develop focus-based groups to work on the results with young people aged 14–25. On completion of this they would be paid a fee of £100 and awarded a university certificate of attendance.

The youth researchers were recruited through five inner city youth organisations which had credibility with minority ethnic group young people. The organisations were: The Asian Girls Duke of Edinburgh Award Scheme; The Bradford Youth Forum; The Cop Shop; The Asian Women and Girls Centre and the Youth Reach Detached Project. These projects work with minority ethnic group young people ranging from those who are in full-time education, those whose parents are long-term unemployed to those whose lifestyles put them at risk of crime. The project asked the staff of these organisations to set up a process with the young people whereby they selected two members of their group to join the project. There was a high level of interest, with many friends wishing to join. The project initially recruited 15 researchers, eight women and seven men whose parental ethnic backgrounds are African, Pathan, Kashmiri, Mirpuri, Bangladeshi, Indian Bengali and Hong Kong Chinese.

The researchers attended a nine-week course on a weekly evening basis from October 1996 to February 1997 at the University. They worked around personal development issues, computer skills and research skills – all of which enabled them to design a collectively owned questionnaire. The process the young researchers used to select their respondents was formulated by them. They decided to pool the contacts each had access to. They looked at the information in terms of the age, gender, ethnic background, area of Bradford they came from and lifestyle. Lifestyle was interpreted to include homelessness, drug dependency and involvement in crime. Each researcher selected 10 people to interview over a period of three weeks.

When the interviews were completed the young researchers were asked to evaluate their part in the project through a questionnaire and group discussion with the project leader. They were also invited to analyse the results. Five of the researchers decided to get involved for a further month and produced a report of the analysis with colour pie charts using computer graphics.

The model and approaches used

Community development has a long history in the UK and there is an extensive literature on the subject (for example Ward and Taylor, 1886; Thompson, 1980; Mayo and Thompson, 1995). In many respects the project draws on this heritage but with some important differences.

Previous community development education has aimed at activists and community leaders. So trade union education has generally been aimed at shop stewards or union representatives. Similarly, work with the unemployed and on other key issues such as health and housing has always aimed to find activists who will in turn use their influence within the community to widen and expand the educational intervention.

The ethnic minority project has consciously aimed not to work with community leaders and activists, believing that one of the key problems lies in how leaders emerge and their ongoing relationships with the ethnic minority community, especially young people and with the authorities. The pattern of working with self-styled community leaders has an imperialist ring to it. In addition it retains and strengthens quasi-feudal relations and acts to block democratisation.

From the outset we have aimed to try and work with communities but from the inside. It is significant that the Bradford commission produced a report on the riots which failed to take account of the views of any of the rioters or their friends. Our intention is to deal with groups such as these. This has been achieved by working with youth groups generally aged between 14 and 25, who through their age are unlikely to wield power within the community or to make any distinction between males and females or between the minority ethnic communities. Reaching them has been through the youth and community service which has been at the forefront in developing relations with 'street kids'.

The second area in which there are similarities but also differences with past projects is our commitment to feeding back into the community. The project has been under pressure to publicise findings to the authorities and public agencies at a very early stage but we believe this has to take second place to feeding it back into the community and with the community developing the final form. This process is financially supported by the University but is organised by the young researchers and the staff of the ethnic minority project. Some of the young reseachers have been involved in organising a youth conference for young people in Bradford where they were able to use the skills they had acquired on the project as well as disseminating information about their findings and experiences. They now want to organise a seminar event to launch the report to key decision-makers in Bradford.

Like all previous community education initiatives our intention is to empower communities but we believe that it is of particular importance in the context of Bradford where educational deprivation is a key factor in the overall cycle of deprivation which afflicts the majority of south Asian communities. The self-development elements of community development are critical and our role is to provide the context, the encouragement and the financial/organisational support. We believe that even small projects like YV can play a critical role in developing self esteem and formulating a community agenda.

The project is still in its infancy and clearly it is impossible to make judgements on its success or failure but it does seem in our case to be reaching groups and individuals who hitherto have had no connection with the University and we hope this will provide a base for those individuals and groups to demand from us and from the University those things which they feel they need.

The challenges to and impact on the youth researchers, the voluntary sector, the Centre for Continuing Education and the University

The challenges of YV have been many and varied, the wider impact of which we will know when the results are publicised more widely in Bradford, but a number of initial conclusions seem to be emerging. The most significant finding is that 64 per cent of respondents believed that their culture, as it has evolved in Bradford, is different from that of their parents and that traditional community leaders in the Asian communities and local councillors do not make the right decisions for young people.

The youth researchers

The group of young people who became the researchers had a number of dynamics working within it which were a challenge to the tutors. The majority of the young people had not met before and knew very little about the activities of the organisations each other came from which made them feel uneasy at first. Most were used to socialising in single-gender environments; some were more confident and articulate than others (these were mainly the women); there were men with criminal records and people with and without partners; homosexual and heterosexual.

The first challenge to the group was to make the time and commitment to the project on a fairly long-term basis, to be sensitive and listen to each other's opinions and value their experiences once they began to share them. They also had to find common ground on which to form working relationships with each other and to overcome south Asian cultural norms in relating to each other as men and women. This solidarity was largely achieved through their commonly-held hostility to certain features of the city. This included their shared low opinion of the police and self appointed community and religious leaders who are all men. This view was echoed in the research findings. The interviewees had even less respect for young leaders from their peer group who, they felt, were being manipulated by older leaders with promises of jobs and media fame. The young people had this to say in response to the questions they were asked about community leadership and decision making:

> *They (council officers) pick one of us and think he speaks for all of us (young people); I don't think one person should have such responsibility over so many people's lives. There should be more youth panels and forums; They are sexist and blooming old – they're not in the twentieth century.*

The voluntary sector

In their meetings the youth researchers questioned the ethics of minority ethnic group organisations, both religious and sectarian, wanting to know how their finances are spent and what they do for youth in the city. The implications of these discussions has had the effect that these issues have now been raised by them in their own organisations, among their peer group and with older members of their family, using data gained from the interviews.

The researchers have decided that they will present the report of this project at a youth conference they wish to organise with the assistance of the Centre. They wish to use this opportunity to tell the community elders what negative impact their hold on the communities and families has and that they want to outline what life is really like for them, to mobilise young people into communicating with each other and get the statutory organisations to listen and act upon their real needs. This will be one of the main challenges of this project.

The Centre for Continuing Education

The ethnic minority project has started a process with young people within the Centre which has far-reaching and challenging effects. In the first instance the Centre has not catered for such a large group of black young people before, who are loud, noisy, unconventionally dressed, do not restrict themselves to the rooms and time they are allocated and because of their experiences of racism are uneasy about being in a white institution and are suspicious of other staff. The project began with some regular centre staff feeling threatened by the presence of the young people but in time this experience has led on to feelings of pride in the fact that the Centre has been able to extend provision to a disadvantaged and difficult to attract client group.

The staff of the project have been challenged by having to work with such a diverse group, having to use many teaching approaches, making the information relevant to the young people, having to think on our feet, accepting criticism, being available for counselling and being accountable to the organisations who sent the young people as they, too, believe they have a stake in the project.

There have been a number of incidents in the short life of the project which have had to be dealt with, such as a researcher being arrested on his way home from the course one night; one leaving due to a personal crisis and phone calls from parents stating their disapproval. This has had the challenging effect of placing the course in a youth and community work context and empowering young people by ensuring that they make decisions about the development of the project.

The University

The University is one of the largest employers in the city, a predominantly white institution in terms of its students and workforce, situated in the heart of the Asian community but with little bearing on the lives of the people who live around it. YV has begun to challenge this by forcing it to open its doors to non-traditional students, giving them access to facilities such as the computers and making the University accountable to ethnic minority communities.

The project has challenged other departments out of their complacency and monopoly over ethnic research, by getting staff across the University and at different levels to work outside their traditional and safe structures and asking them to demystify research by removing jargon and making it appear an accessible and interesting profession. Departments which conduct prestigious research programmes have been very excited by the prospect of this group of young people, especially the women, who they view as 'in house' research fodder. This is because in the past they have found it particularly difficult to gain access to young people. By inviting other staff to work on YV the ethnic minority project and the Centre have gained university wide credibility.

The results of the research project are currently being examined by the researchers and will subsequently form the basis of a short report to be presented to the youth communities of Bradford. This in turn will be fed into the mainstream institutions within the city in the hope that it will impact on those engaged in the formulation and delivery of public policy. We have periodically been presenting the results and model used to our colleagues within the continuing education movement and have in turn been receiving their comments and criticisms. The most recent being an inter-university peer group evaluation of the project.

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Chapter 12

Does it make any difference that we are a university? The community perspective

Julia Preece

This book started with a commentary on recent policy and academic discourses concerning widening participation and some of the omissions in those discourses. This final chapter explores how community-based university provision is perceived by individual learners. After a brief reference to topical contexts for university continuing education the empirical research refers to non award bearing provision amongst socio-economic groups most on the margins of educational participation. The findings produce interesting comparisons across different working class communities which challenge the boundaries for higher education (HE) learning.

Universities have been concerned with their own mission and practice, particularly in relation to reaching the extended community, for some time. A pre-occupation has been the identification of a distinctive HE experience and its potential contribution to the learning needs of wider society (for example: Mansbridge, 1920; Wiltshire, 1956; Robbins, 1963; Russell, 1973; Fordham, 1979; Ward and Taylor, 1986; Duke, 1992). The debate in the 1990s has centred round equipping the learner with a flexible set of skills to accommodate the demands of a fast-changing world (HEQC, 1995; Allan, 1996) where learning is lifelong and requires constant updating (Duke, 1992; NIACE, 1993; Tuckett, 1996). At the same time, prior to his report *Higher Education in the Learning Society* (1997), Sir Ron Dearing emphasised the need to 'reach out to excluded communities'; that 'universities had a critical role in teaching students to treasure democratic society' with an implication that the university mission should include a commitment to establishing an 'HE culture' in places where none exists (THES, 1996). Continuing Education (CE), in particular, has pursued a historical social mission to do just that.

Slowey, for instance, offers a number of distinctive characteristics for CE in an HE context. It is a responsive, flexible mode of delivery, fostering values of citizenship; it is often inter-disciplinary in nature and recognises experience as part of the learning process. She describes CE primarily with two broad functions. Firstly it is targeted at 'learners other than those progressing directly to HE from full time initial studies' (Slowey, 1997: 196) and acts as a bridge between wider societal interests and the academic world. CE in this context maintains a historical commitment to 'countering educational disadvantage' (UCACE, 1992). Secondly she, along with others, claims university CE promotes a distinctive HE culture of developing critical, independent thinking skills. It is this distinctive HE culture which is of most interest to this chapter – especially how that culture is perceived by those most on the margins of university provision. The question for this chapter is whether the theoretical arguments translate into evidence amongst those whom the new learning ideology is attempting to reach

– and how effective is the existing university CE system in delivering goals for widened participation?

In describing the research I shall use evidence from one CE initiative to stimulate an HE culture amongst adult learners. I shall draw primarily on theoretical principles which explain what Barnett describes as the 'emancipatory' concept of HE as these link most closely to the current CE model of lifelong learning:

> *The development of the student's intellectual skills or academic competencies . . . critical abilities, especially the propensity to be self critical; the ability to analyse and evaluate relevant connections; the willingness to accept the rules of rational inquiry and the self motivation of the students, such as to go on learning and being self critical independently of any intrinsic influence (Barnett, 1988: 245).*

The findings will suggest that the HE sector has much work to do in filling its own information gap to the wider public, though there are indications of the potential for everyone to benefit from an HE learning experience in the form in which it is proposed, particularly in the CE world.

The research

The research took place in a pre-1992 university. The outcomes reported here are part of a larger research project which compared discourses amongst different social groups. The respondents had, in most cases, only limited involvement in post-compulsory education. Their CE experience followed the social purpose model outlined by Johnston in this book.

A concern throughout the research was the mismatch of values and perceptions about university education between the learners under discussion and the academic discourse of university providers. Another concern was to identify what forms of learning were taking place and how the learning articulated by the participants would mesh with the goals of university CE. To this aim I have identified two groups of 10 adult learners from different, white, working class communities and backgrounds. Although they participated in the University's targeted 'community' programme they were, in university terms, 'non participants'. The data under discussion has been selected from individual interviews with each learner. In most cases the learners were interviewed twice over an interval of some 18 months. Although the interview sample is small, and a theoretical rather than representative one, the results offer more detailed information than can be obtained from large scale surveys and contains responses from people who are seldom represented in university education. A brief profile of the two groups is as follows.

Portside

The participants were all indigenous residents of a small, one-industry town in the north of England. Their ages ranged from 35 to 70 years, though the majority were over 55. Seven women and three men were interviewed. All had received initial schooling till the statutory leaving age. Parental occupations for all 10 participants were skilled, semi-skilled or unskilled. The participants' own careers included apprenticeships, factory or shop work. Three women ultimately did office jobs. All experienced some form of work related training but only two had attended college recently. Although none of their peer group went to university from school, the children of three families entered HE.

All the interviewees attended an introductory (14-hour) family history course. Most supplemented this with local history topics provided by the community programme and some attended introductory science and politics courses the following year. Nearly all joined a local family history society which formed as a direct result of the first course.

Riverside

The participants in this cohort all had some form of disability and nine of them regularly attended a social services day centre. With the exception of Henry, an ex-farmer who was privately educated, and Tony who completed a textile apprenticeship, their occupations were all unskilled with no work-related training. Although all were of employable age (38 to 55 years) they had been unemployed some time and none expected to work again. No participants had any academic qualifications, though Paul obtained a series of first aid qualifications as an adult. Four people had started, but not completed, college courses in the past, while six had no experience of adult education before the university community courses. There were four men and six women. Two women and Paul had been disabled since birth. Mandy's son went to university and Henry remembered some of his peers going to university.

The majority of interviewees had attended a short introduction to committee skills (10 hours) and/or a longer (40 hours) community participation skills course. Some continued with ensuing community courses including local history, confidence building and blues music topics.

Each interviewee was asked the same set of questions. The following relate to this chapter:

- did you know universities offered courses to the general public?
- what were your expectations of a university course?
- did it make any difference to you that the course was organised by a university? (second interview)
- were there any distinguishing features to you about the course which made it different from other learning experiences?
- what were your feelings about your learning experience after the course? (first and second interview)
- what did you learn and how have you used that learning since? (second interview).

The findings

The results of the first questions were, perhaps, predictable. Only two people from Portside and one from Riverside knew that universities offered courses to the general public. Only three people from Portside felt the University's role in the courses made any difference to them, although four had expressed initial anxieties about attending a 'university course'. From Riverside, none, except Henry and Carol, felt the University's involvement made a difference in terms of expectations, standard, status or content. Indeed, at least three from Riverside specified no distinction between further education

(FE) and HE: 'Would they not all be the same? There wouldn't be that much difference would there?' (Mandy). All 10 at Portside, however distinguished universities from college courses in terms of level.

Although the general pattern across both groups was one of not knowing about university CE and what it might offer the 'ordinary person' there appeared to be differences in nuances of understanding about FE and HE between the older, working class adults with apprenticeship backgrounds and the adults from Riverside. The following discussions therefore identify each learner group's responses separately.

Portside

Not surprisingly people's, often hypothetical, perceptions of what might be distinctive about university or college courses were rather vague. The Portside participants who had children in HE often relied on their experiences. So Chris, for instance, felt that people would be taught to 'analyse things'; two used the phrase 'train the mind' and three referred to their children being taught to 'think for themselves' and 'work on their own'. Julie felt that college was more an extension of school; two identified colleges as being smaller than universities – which, for Eric, meant they were 'less important'. The most consistent perception of university was that it would be 'beyond me' (seven replies). Three people felt that criteria for access to university relied on a mixture of personal intelligence and middle class backgrounds, usually in relation to financial resources, though two also felt it was for people with career aspirations. For Eric and Peggy university meant lots of study and young people only.

In terms of whether the community courses were what the participants would expect from a university, four people said they had not known what to expect and five were relieved that the course was not too difficult for them. Six interviewees felt the course was more informal than they expected. Two said it was 'just right. . what I expected'.

Feelings after course completion ranged from a sense of increased personal ability (five answers) and increased knowledge or awareness (five answers): 'It's made me think about things more. . opened up new avenues. . . You can see another person's point of view and realise that your angle had been wrong,' (Emma).

Riverside

Of the riverside participants six people suggested that college courses would probably be more like a classroom than their community experience. Expectations of university education came almost exclusively from Henry. He was the only one to suggest that university education was text book driven. He and Mandy, whose son went to university, both claimed that HE students would need to be intelligent: 'Not everybody could go to university, you've got to have it up there in the first place,' (Mandy). Only Henry, Mandy and Gillian suggested that you needed A levels to go to university, though Dave 'thought you had to pass a test'. However, two of the participants saw college and university in the same way – simply 'for posh people'. Two, like the Portside participants, suggested that only children with 'better off parents' went to university. Gillian added she thought it was probably for 'topping up only' with lectures, whereas you finished your main education at college. June simply thought university students were 'way out' and Susan suggested they study 'subjects like History and English' at university.

Again, it is not surprising to learn that five people stated they did not know what to expect from the community courses (50 per cent of the combined number). Four people, however, like two from Portside, said yes it was what they expected. Only Dave initially thought he would not be able to cope, though he commented afterwards: 'I got pulled into it nicely,' and Susan said it was less difficult than she expected.

Although some of their phraseology was different from Portside, the Riverside participants' feelings after the course were very similar: 'It brought me out of myself . . . made me feel better in myself,' were typical reactions. Four felt stimulated to do more courses. Indeed Gillian repeated a Portside phrase: 'It gives you a broader outlook.' One stated she was 'more able to contribute than I thought,' echoing one Portside comment, and two highlighted an increased ability to 'put my point across,' or 'not just accept is it right or wrong' (Paul). There was an impression, for some, then, that 'what you got' must be 'what it is like'. Although many were confused about what HE learning entailed, all had gained personally from the experience.

These brief answers indicate two issues in relation to widened participation: firstly the lack of public awareness about CE availability for the ordinary adult; secondly the lack of prior awareness about HE learning values in a CE context and their applicability to personal lives.

The ability to compare with FE learning was limited, so people's perceptions of what they had really gained had to be asked in different ways and then compared with the literature on HE. In the second interview an attempt was made to elicit more detail about learning experience and how this had been applied in situations outside the course. In other words, had the course stimulated independent learning and critical thinking skills and, if so, how? Space limits the number of examples which can be drawn on so I shall confine them to three.

Teaching style

One way of eliciting from people whether they were being encouraged to create, rather than receive knowledge, was to invite interpretations of the learning process. The following is typical of many responses.

Eric from Portside was a postman by profession. He was now retired and in his 60s. Eric had gained a number of post office qualifications by correspondence course on leaving school at the age of 15. He described his 'community' experience in some detail showing the course encouraged application of critical analysis through reference to participants' opinions to develop abstract ideas. The subject was politics and the course lasted 20 hours:

> *He'd [the tutor] taken excerpts from each of the manifestos and he asked us to comment between us in the little groups as to what we thought was good or bad and to write it down and to talk about it . . . it created quite a lot of discussion did that. It was amazing how people had different opinions about it. Where you had some people saying: 'Yes I agree that's a good idea,' and the next person to you would say: 'No I don't think it is,'. . . but it didn't bring any falling out or anything, everybody sort of respected other people's points of view . . . If someone said: 'Yes I think this is a good idea,' he would sort of expand the other side of the argument . . . and then this other person would give the opposite to you and he would go the other way then so that he was trying to explain both positions, so that*

> *you were more broad minded after this particular incident had come up . . . and that was the whole idea I suppose of it.*

Not only did Eric remark on the spirit of critical inquiry where nobody 'fell out' over the discussion, he also picked up the educational goal of producing a balanced argument and stimulating critical awareness, so prized in HE as the essence of an inquiring mind (Taylor, 1985; Skilbeck and Connell, 1996).

The goals of lifelong learning and critical analysis in an HE context, however, are to stimulate continued and independent learning and application of knowledge in different settings (Knapper and Cropley, 1991). The next extracts are explored for their demonstration of these learning outcomes.

Learning outcomes

Patrick from Portside and Gillian from Riverside demonstrated these extended learning goals to differing degrees. Gillian had cerebral palsy and was now in her late 40s. Her abiding regret was that she had only ever received special school education. She worked in factories as a young adult, but now was a housewife, mother and active member of Scope (formerly the Spastics Society) and the social services day centre. Gillian used a wheelchair and only travelled in adapted transport. She attended both the committee skills and ensuing community participation skills course. She also attended a local history course organised through the community programme at the Scope venue. Gillian identified aspects of two courses which helped her apply learning in different contexts:

> *The committee skills was good because it was relevant and because I'm involved in committees. It gave me confidence to take more part in committees, because before you didn't know whether you had a point or not, but you've got that experience now; when to come in and when not to. . . . . .[In the history course] she [the tutor] used to talk about all the different places and old fashioned buildings; she'd talk about the dates they were built and I would say: 'How can you know that?' and she would say: 'Look at the top of the building above you, you've got to look up.' And the next time when I was going along the street I would look up at the building, not all the time, but it made you more aware . . . and the dates were in the wall.*

An academic might be forgiven for challenging whether these outcomes were truly relevant to the ethos and standards of an HE experience. They are outcomes, one might conjecture, which could be obtained from any FE or local authority course. Gillian's statement of extended application of her learning did match, however, the profile of an inquiring mind identified as one of the characteristics of lifelong learning taken from Candy *et al* (1994): 'A love of learning; a sense of curiosity and question seeking, a critical spirit, comprehension, monitoring and self evaluation' (Skilbeck and Connell, 1996: 57). Gillian had also tracked her own learning and evaluated its applicability in committee meetings. Her interest in history had been stimulated and she had asked questions about how to include herself in further learning. A critical spirit was also growing in terms of how to participate in meetings. The learning outcomes thus fulfil Tuckett's (1996) claims of an HE learning experience which should be available to all. A better description, perhaps, might be that Gillian was starting her path to life long learning. Whether she had yet acquired the 'information literacy' of most HE profiles

– such as knowledge of a field of study and its information sources and variety of media (Ball 1990) – is still debatable.

If such learning outcomes are not acceptable as part of an HE culture, however, the question must be asked – where in the remaining education structure can such a CE ethos be nurtured? In a world of performance driven and vocationally linked systems, where do the unemployed and socially excluded begin? If the HE profile of a lifelong learner represents an accumulation of intellect, literacy and autonomy, who is responsible for teaching it? Furthermore, who decides at what entry point on this learning continuum that universities should intervene? This latter question is particularly pertinent in the following example from Patrick, a bricklayer in his thirties, whose profile as a lifelong learner would not have registered very high on the continuum before his family history course. His main experience of post school education was day release to college as part of his bricklaying apprenticeship. He attended the family history course which included lectures from the tutor, with discussion and feedback sessions.

Patrick's analysis of course gain included Barnett's (1988) application of learning and rules of 'rational inquiry': 'How to make a record of what you've actually found and be able to reference it in a way that you could actually find that information again without a search,' (Patrick); and he independently extended the learning experience with his wife:

> *It wasn't just to do a family tree, we wanted to do a profile of each family member and describe the surroundings as they were at the time . . . we're now encouraging people to tell stories which are never written down.*

Patrick's responses also demonstrated an ability for sustained study (Taylor, 1985; Barnett, 1988) and capacity to 'integrate disparate elements' (Ball, 1990: 69):

> *You come across a lot of sort of local history, sort of social history as you're looking through .. I mean like the formation of the town, when certain streets were built and you know cause we go up to it and say: ' It won't be there because that wasn't built yet.' Well, do I know that, you know, things like, silly things like the back of H__ street, there wasn't anything there in 1881. We know that just by looking through newspaper cuttings, things like that, you know, you just pick little bits up.*

Patrick's story of his learning journey is not unique. Whilst not everyone in Portside elaborated on the process as much as he did, their creation of a thriving family history society with a current membership of over 200, was in itself indicative of similar activity elsewhere. The significance of this particular story has less to do with its ability to demonstrate McNair's key claims for an HE as opposed to FE experience: 'All knowledge is contestable, albeit with certain rules of inquiry . . . learning how to create new knowledge . . . and test the frameworks for themselves,' (McNair, 1995: 5); it has more to do with the nature of the subject content itself. Family history as a field of study was rejected within my university's CE academic field. The course was only allowed because it was being promoted through the community project which had a specific goal of attracting non-standard HE learners. The research opportunity, however, to elicit learning outcomes from the participants has revealed several factors.

Firstly, the findings suggest a confirmation of Hague's challenge to universities that they should: 'stop assuming . . . that all students are essentially similar and will develop in much the same way through an undifferentiated education process' (Hague, 1991: 63). Patrick had been in his own words 'a thickun at school . . . glad to get out of the place'. The likelihood of Patrick entering the HE system via a discipline specific course was remote. He was attracted to this subject and his lifelong learning skills developed through that interest.

Similarly Gillian had never quite managed to go to college because she could: 'never quite get up enough confidence to go'. The community courses were not vocational, nor, in university CE terms, were they conventional subject disciplines of a content pertinent to academic study. Yet for Gillian the experience had provoked a renewed interest in study: 'I really feel I could go for it now.'

These stories of motivation in themselves are not dissimilar from those proclaimed for years among adult educators and proponents of non-credit study (McGivney, 1990, for example). What is distinctive now about them is the ability to match the new HE discourse for lifelong learning with the self-evaluation of the learners' own progress.

The implications for such findings in terms of widening participation in HE are multiple. If HE boundaries have less to do with a 'kind of education' (Tuckett 1996: 48) and more to do with an information literacy model, then the education system itself needs a continuum of learning opportunities which apply HE principles of critical thought throughout the FE/HE adult education system. If, however, as Patrick demonstrated, HE learning can develop in non-standard ways, then universities have a responsibility to explore the lifelong learning model and its entry route into graduateness more flexibly than has hitherto been undertaken. A further issue for the HE system as a whole is the disparity between its own internal debate and public perceptions of FE/HE divisions, or even what constitutes an HE learning experience. For universities to survive amidst a market-driven, media-led and consumerist society, they need to change public perceptions of what they are worth, and to whom (Williamson, 1996; Coffield, 1996). All these goals need to take on board the many strategies outlined in this book, such as pro-active guidance approaches, creating structures which allow the student to define learning pace, encouraging self evaluation and recognising student diversity.

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Index

Aboriginal (and Torres Strait Islander) 75, 77, 78, 79, 80
Access 56, 60, 71
access 1, 2, 4, 13, 16, 40, 47, 51, 67, 70, 71–2, 73, 75 78, 79–80, 84, 86, 88–90, 110
  access summer school 31–37
accessibility 7, 13, 17, 52, 67–8, 82
accreditation, accredited 2, 15 24, 54
  APEL 18, 41, 94
  CATS 15
  credit 3, 53
  non accredited 48, 50–2 71
  non award bearing 52, 107
accountable 2, 76, 105, 106
admissions 86
  procedures 73
  open enrolment 17
adult learners 42, 57
Australia 75–83
  HECS 76, 81–82

barriers 16, 30, 47, 69–70
BITE 72–3
black communities *see* community
boundary 1
  boundaries 15–16, 27, 68, 80, 102, 114
Bradford university 100–106
bridge project 59–60

change 47, 70, 84, 87, 99, 114
  cultural 15, 17, 18, 19, 62
  institutional 1, 6
Chelyabinsk State University 84–90
class 30, 82
community 70, 93
  black communities 59–60
  ethnic minority, minority ethnic 7, 94, 95, 97, 100–101
  Penderry 48–50, 57–8
  working class 59, 60–1 67, 69, 70, 73–4, 108–9
community development 50 102, 103–4
  community development programme 21
community education 2, 53, 71–2
continuing education 2, 30–54 56–7, 63, 64, 107, 111, 112, 114
Cork, university college 71
Coventry university 39–44

curriculum 50, 53–4, 68, 79, 80, 94, 95, 96
  inclusive 6
  negotiated 32
  relevant, relevance 3, 6 52, 54, 67, 69

Dearing 3–4
difference 6, 17
  diversity 3, 7
disability 79, 109
  disabled 59, 84–90
disadvantage 13–16, 30, 31–2, 73, 77, 79–80, 82
distance 81, 86, 87
Dublin City university 71
Dundee university 33–37

EAN 84
embedding 5, 14, 19, 64, 96, 97
empowerment 7, 93, 102, 106
equal opportunity/ies 4, 17
  disabilities 78, 79
  equality 67, 74
  equity 3, 6, 7, 75–83
  ethnic minorities 76
  indigenous people 77, 80
  inequality 68
  justice 67, 68, 74, 94
  quality 32, 37, 80, 89
  rural 78, 81, 84–90
  women 76, 78, 79

family 56
  intergenerational 6, 62
Fryer 4–5

guidance 5–6, 15–19, 34, 37, 59, 63
  features 20, 22–28
  group 23–26
  in community setting 40
  IT 39–44

HECS 76, 81, 82
HELP 72
Horizon project 61–2

inclusive 4 *see also* curriculum
  inclusion 51
indigenous people *see also* Aboriginal
international collaboration 84–90

Ireland *68*
  BITE *72–3*
  Cork *71*
  Dublin *71*
  HELP *72*
  LCBEI *71–2, 73*
IT *39–44, 87*

JEP *84–90*

Kennedy *3*
knowledge *2, 3, 7, 48, 74, 80*
  experiential *17–18*

Lancaster university *20–21*
LCBEI *71–2, 73*
Leicester university *93–9*
lifelong learning *2, 4–5, 30, 64 94, 107, 112–114*
liberal adult education *12, 15*

mass higher education *76*
  mass university *2*
mentoring *59–60*
  role models *60, 70*
minority ethnic *93–9*
  Aboriginal *77, 80*
  African Caribbean *97*
  Asian *100–1, 104–5*
  black *59–60*
  black tutors advisory group *97*
  indigenous people *77, 80*
  Torres strait islanders *77 80*
Monash university *79–81*
Moscow *84*

outreach *15, 63, 71*

partnership *47, 64, 73, 102*
  collaboration *63*
  links *43, 51*
  networks *83*
  networking *63*
  partners *40, 44, 62*
participation *4, 7, 50–1, 78*
  rates *1, 3, 4*
Penderry *47–54*
poverty *47, 51*
  poor *70*
progression *18, 33, 35, 47, 52, 53*

quality *see* equity
Queens university, Belfast *71*

racism *2, 7, 94, 99, 105*
recruitment *32*
  open enrolment *17*
relevance *24 see also* curriculum
research *7, 15, 106, 108–114*
  action research *16, 93–9*
  Layder's research map *93, 95, 98–9*
  participatory *47*
  youth researchers *102–4*
retention *33, 35, 78*
role models *70, 72, 97*
rural *81, 84–5*
  distance *81*
  distance learning *87*
Russia *84–90*

Saturday school *98*
Scotland *30–37*
Sheffield Hallam university *57–64*
social exclusion *47–9, 51, 54 see also* disadvantage
  socio economic *48, 67 69, 84–5*
social purpose education *2, 13–14 see also* curriculum
Southampton university *11–19*
staff development *17, 93, 96*
strategy/ies *3, 4, 5, 6, 18–19 39, 57, 59, 61, 64, 79, 80, 84*
  issues *62–3*
  strategic *88*
summer school *see* access
Swansea university, of Wales *50*

TEMPUS/TACIS project *84–90*
transferable skills *33–4, 41, 48*

unemployment *21–2, 49, 58*
  unemployed *23, 69, 70*
Ulster university *72*
university culture, cultures *11, 14*
  expectations *16, 18, 43 109–110*
  image *52–61*
  learning experiences *111–114*
  perceptions *42, 114*

vocational/ism *4, 18, 58*

Westminster university *80*
working class *see* community

youth *100*
  Asian *101–2, 104, 105*
  young people *30*
  Youth Views *102–106*

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